GABRIELLE De BERGERAC

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PART I

MY good old friend, in his white flannel dressing-gown, with his wig "removed," as they say of the dinner-service, by a crimson ghtcap, sat for some moments gazing into the :e. At last he looked up. I knew what as coming. "Apropos, that little debt of ine—"

Not that the debt was really very little. But [. de Bergerac was a man of honor, and I iew I should receive my dues. He told me ankly that he saw no way, either in the pres- it or the future, to reimburse me in cash. [is only treasures were his paintings; would choose one of them? Now I had not spent i hour in M. de Bergerac's little parlor twice week for three winters, without learning that

the Baron's paintings were, with a singl
ception, of very indifferent merit. On
other hand, I had taken a great fancy t
picture thus excepted. Yet, as I knew it
a family portrait, I hesitated to claim i
refused to make a choice. M. de Berg
however, insisted, and I finally laid my fi
on the charming image of my friend's
I of course insisted, on my side, that M
Bergerac should retain it during the remai
of his life, and so it was only after his de
that I came into possession of it. It h
above my table as I write, and I have on
glance up at the face of my heroine to
how vain it is to attempt to describe it.
portrait represents, in dimensions severa
grees below those of nature, the head
shoulders of a young girl of two-and-tw
The execution of the work is not espec
strong, but it is thoroughly respectable
one may easily see that the painter deeply
preciated the character of the face. The c
tenance is interesting rather than beautif

the forehead broad and open, the eyes slightly prominent, all the features full and firm and yet replete with gentleness. The head is slightly thrown back, as if in movement, and the lips are parted in a half-smile. And yet, in spite of this tender smile, I always fancy that the eyes are sad. The hair, dressed without powder, is rolled back over a high cushion (as I suppose), and adorned just above the left ear with a single white rose; while, on the other side, a heavy tress from behind hangs upon the neck with a sort of pastoral freedom. The neck is long and full, and the shoulders rather broad. The whole face has a look of mingled softness and decision, and seems to reveal a nature inclined to revery, affection, and repose, but capable of action and even of heroism. Mlle. de Bergerac died under the axe of the Terrorists. Now that I had acquired a certain property in this sole memento of her life, I felt a natural curiosity as to her character and history. Had M. de Bergerac known his aunt? Did he remember her?

Would it be a tax on his good-nature to suggest that he should favor me with a few reminiscences? The old man fixed his eyes on the fire, and laid his hand on mine, as if his memory were fain to draw from both sources—from the ruddy glow and from my fresh young blood—a certain vital, quickening warmth. A mild, rich smile ran to his lips, and he pressed my hand. Somehow,—I hardly know why,—I felt touched almost to tears. Mlle. de Bergerac had been a familiar figure in her nephew's boyhood, and an important event in her life had formed a sort of episode in his younger days. It was a simple enough story; but such as it was, then and there, settling back into his chair, with the fingers of the clock wandering on to the small hours of the night, he told it with a tender, lingering garrulity. Such as it is, I repeat it. I shall give, as far as possible, my friend's words, or the English of them; but the reader will have to do without his inimitable accents. For them there is no English.

My father's household at Bergerac (said the Baron) consisted, exclusive of the servants, of five persons,—himself, my mother, my aunt (Mlle. de Bergerac), M. Coquelin (my preceptor), and M. Coquelin's pupil, the heir of the house. Perhaps, indeed, I should have numbered M. Coquelin among the servants. It is certain that my mother did. Poor little woman! she was a great stickler for the rights of birth. Her own birth was all she had, for she was without health, beauty, or fortune. My father, on his side, had very little of the last; his property of Bergerac yielded only enough to keep us without discredit. We gave no entertainments, and passed the whole year in the country; and as my mother was resolved that her weak health should do her a kindness as well as an injury, it was put forward as an apology for everything. We led at best a simple, somnolent sort of life. There was a terrible amount of leisure for rural gentlefolks in those good old days. We slept a great deal; we slept, you will say, on a volcano. It was

a very different world from this patent new world of yours, and I may say that I was born on a different planet. Yes, in 1789, there came a great convulsion; the earth cracked and opened and broke, and this poor old *pays de France* went whirling through space. When I look back at my childhood, I look over a gulf. Three years ago, I spent a week at a country house in the neighborhood of Bergerac, and my hostess drove me over to the site of the château. The house has disappeared, and there's a homœopathic—hydropathic—what do you call it?—establishment erected in its place. But the little town is there, and the bridge on the river, and the church where I was christened, and the double row of lime-trees on the market-place, and the fountain in the middle. There's only one striking difference: the sky is changed. I was born under the old sky. It was black enough, of course, if we had only had eyes to see it; but to me, I confess, it looked divinely blue. And in fact it was very bright,—the little

patch under which I cast my juvenile shadow. An odd enough little shadow you would have thought it. I was promiscuously cuddled and fondled. I was M. le Chevalier, and prospective master of Bergerac; and when I walked to church on Sunday, I had a dozen yards of lace on my coat and a little sword at my side. My poor mother did her best to make me good for nothing. She had her maid to curl my hair with the tongs, and she used with her own fingers to stick little black patches on my face. And yet I was a good deal neglected too, and I would go for days with black patches of another sort. I'm afraid I should have got very little education if a kind Providence hadn't given me poor M. Coquelin. A kind Providence, that is, and my father; for with my mother my tutor was no favorite. She thought him—and, indeed, she called him—a bumpkin, a clown. There was a very pretty abbé among her friends, M. Tiblaud by name, whom she wished to install at the château as my intellec-

tual, and her spiritual, adviser; but my father, who, without being anything of an *esprit fort,* had an incurable aversion to a priest out of church, very soon routed this pious scheme. My poor father was an odd figure of a man. He belonged to a type as completely obsolete as the biggest of those big-boned, pre-historic monsters discovered by M. Cuvier. He was not overburdened with opinions or principles. The only truth that was absolute to his perception was that the house of Bergerac was *de bonne noblesse.* His tastes were not delicate. He was fond of the open air, of long rides, of the smell of the game-stocked woods in autumn, of playing at bowls, of a drinking-cup, of a dirty pack of cards, and a free-spoken tavern Hebe. I have nothing of him but his name. I strike you as an old fossil, a relic, a mummy. Good heavens! you should have seen him,—his good, his bad manners, his arrogance, his *bonhomie,* his stupidity and pluck.

My early years had promised ill for my

health; I was listless and languid, and my father had been content to leave me to the women, who, on the whole, as I have said, left me a good deal to myself. But one morning he seemed suddenly to remember that he had a little son and heir running wild. It was, I remember, in my ninth year, a morning early in June, after breakfast, at eleven o'clock. He took me by the hand and led me out on the terrace, and sat down and made me stand between his knees. I was engaged upon a great piece of bread and butter, which I had brought away from the table. He put his hand into my hair, and, for the first time that I could remember, looked me straight in the face. I had seen him take the forelock of a young colt in the same way, when he wished to look at its teeth. What did he want? Was he going to send me for sale? His eyes seemed prodigiously black and his eyebrows terribly thick. They were very much the eyebrows of that portrait. My father passed his

other hand over the muscles of my arms and the sinews of my poor little legs.

"Chevalier," said he, "you're dreadfully puny. What's one to do with you?"

I dropped my eyes and said nothing. Heaven knows I felt puny.

"It's time you knew how to read and write. What are you blushing at?"

"I *do* know how to read," said I.

My father stared. "Pray, who taught you?"

"I learned in a book."

"What book?"

I looked up at my father before I answered. His eyes were bright, and there was a little flush in his face,—I hardly knew whether of pleasure or anger. I disengaged myself and went into the drawing-room, where I took from a cupboard in the wall an odd volume of Scarron's *Roman comique*. As I had to go through the house, I was absent some minutes. When I came back I found a stranger on the terrace. A young man in poor clothes, with

a walking-stick, had come up from the avenue, and stood before my father, with his hat in his hand. At the farther end of the terrace was my aunt. She was sitting on the parapet, playing with a great black crow, which we kept in a cage in the dining-room window. I betook myself to my father's side with my book, and stood staring at our visitor. He was a dark-eyed, sunburnt young man, of about twenty-eight, of middle height, broad in the shoulders and short in the neck, with a slight lameness in one of his legs. He looked travel-stained and weary and pale. I remember there was something prepossessing in his being pale. I didn't know that the paleness came simply from his being horribly hungry.

"In view of these facts," he said, as I came up, "I have ventured to presume upon the good-will of M. le Baron."

My father sat back in his chair, with his legs apart and a hand on each knee and his waistcoat unbuttoned, as was usual after a meal. "Upon my word," he said, "I don't

know what I can do for you. There's no place for you in my own household."

The young man was silent a moment. "Has M. le Baron any children?" he asked, after a pause.

"I have my son whom you see here."

"May I inquire if M. le Chevalier is supplied with a preceptor?"

My father glanced down at me. "Indeed, he seems to be," he cried. "What have you got there?" And he took my book. "The little rascal has M. Scarron for a teacher. This is his preceptor!"

I blushed very hard, and the young man smiled. "Is that your only teacher?" he asked.

"My aunt taught me to read," I said, looking round at her.

"And did your aunt recommend this book?" asked my father.

"My aunt gave me M. Plutarque," I said.

My father burst out laughing, and the young man put his hat up to his mouth. But I could

see that above it his eyes had a very good-natured look. My aunt, seeing that her name had been mentioned, walked slowly over to where we stood, still holding her crow on her hand. You have her there before you; judge how she looked. I remember that she frequently dressed in blue, my poor aunt, and I know that she must have dressed simply. Fancy her in a light stuff gown, covered with big blue flowers, with a blue ribbon in her dark hair, and the points of her high-heeled blue slippers peeping out under her stiff white petticoat. Imagine her strolling along the terrace of the château with a villainous black crow perched on her wrist. You'll admit it's a picture.

"Is all this true, sister?" said my father. "Is the Chevalier such a scholar?"

"He's a clever boy," said my aunt, putting her hand on my head.

"It seems to me that at a pinch he could do without a preceptor," said my father. "He has such a learned aunt."

"I've taught him all I know. He had begun to ask me questions that I was quite unable to answer."

"I should think he might," cried my father, with a broad laugh, "when once he had got into M. Scarron!"

"Questions out of Plutarch," said Mlle. de Bergerac, "which you must know Latin to answer."

"Would you like to know Latin, M. le Chevalier?" said the young man, looking at me with a smile.

"Do you know Latin,—you?" I asked.

"Perfectly," said the young man, with the same smile.

"Do you want to learn Latin, Chevalier?" said my aunt.

"Every gentleman learns Latin," said the young man.

I looked at the poor fellow, his dusty shoes and his rusty clothes. "But you're not a gentleman," said I.

He blushed up to his eyes. "Ah, I only teach it," he said.

In this way it was that Pierre Coquelin came to be my governor. My father, who had a mortal dislike to all kinds of cogitation and inquiry, engaged him on the simple testimony of his face and of his own account of his talents. His history, as he told it, was in three words as follows: He was of our province, and neither more nor less than the son of a village tailor. He is my hero: *tirez-vous de là.* Showing a lively taste for books, instead of being promoted to the paternal bench, he had been put to study with the Jesuits. After a residence of some three years with these gentlemen, he had incurred their displeasure by a foolish breach of discipline, and had been turned out into the world. Here he had endeavored to make capital out of his excellent education, and had gone up to Paris with the hope of earning his bread as a scribbler. But in Paris he scribbled himself hungry and nothing more, and was in fact in a fair way to die of star-

vation. At last he encountered an agent of the Marquis de Rochambeau, who was collecting young men for the little army which the latter was prepared to conduct to the aid of the American insurgents. He had engaged himself among Rochambeau's troops, taken part in several battles, and finally received a wound in his leg of which the effect was still perceptible. At the end of three years he had returned to France, and repaired on foot, with what speed he might, to his native town; but only to find that in his absence his father had died, after a tedious illness, in which he had vainly lavished his small earnings upon the physicians, and that his mother had married again, very little to his taste. Poor Coquelin was friendless, penniless, and homeless. But once back on his native soil, he found himself possessed again by his old passion for letters, and, like all starving members of his craft, he had turned his face to Paris. He longed to make up for his three years in the wilderness. He trudged along, lonely, hungry, and weary, till he came

to the gates of Bergerac. Here, sitting down to rest on a stone, he saw us come out on the terrace to digest our breakfast in the sun. Poor Coquelin! he had the stomach of a gentleman. He was filled with an irresistible longing to rest awhile from his struggle with destiny, and it seemed to him that for a mess of smoking pottage he would gladly exchange his vague and dubious future. In obedience to this simple impulse,—an impulse touching in its humility, when you knew the man,—he made his way up the avenue. We looked affable enough,—an honest country gentleman, a young girl playing with a crow, and a little boy eating bread and butter; and it turned out, we were as kindly as we looked.

For me, I soon grew extremely fond of him, and I was glad to think in later days that he had found me a thoroughly docile child. In those days, you know, thanks to Jean Jacques Rousseau, there was a vast stir in men's notions of education, and a hundred theories afloat about the perfect teacher and the perfect

pupil. Coquelin was a firm devotee of Jean Jacques, and very possibly applied some of his precepts to my own little person. But of his own nature Coquelin was incapable of anything that was not wise and gentle, and he had no need to learn humanity in books. He was, nevertheless, a great reader, and when he had not a volume in his hand he was sure to have two in his pockets. He had half a dozen little copies of the Greek and Latin poets, bound in yellow parchment, which, as he said, with a second shirt and a pair of white stockings, constituted his whole library. He had carried these books to America, and read them in the wilderness, and by the light of camp-fires, and in crowded, steaming barracks in winter-quarters. He had a passion for Virgil. M. Scarron was very soon dismissed to the cupboard, among the dice-boxes and the old packs of cards, and I was confined for the time to Virgil and Ovid and Plutarch, all of which, with the stimulus of Coquelin's own delight, I found very good reading. But better than any of

the stories I read were those stories of his wanderings, and his odd companions and encounters, and charming tales of pure fantasy, which, with the best grace in the world, he would recite by the hour. We took long walks, and he told me the names of the flowers and the various styles of the stars, and I remember that I often had no small trouble to keep them distinct. He wrote a very bad hand, but he made very pretty drawings of the subjects then in vogue,—nymphs and heroes and shepherds and pastoral scenes. I used to fancy that his knowledge and skill were inexhaustible, and I pestered him so for entertainment that I certainly proved that there were no limits to his patience.

When he first came to us he looked haggard and thin and weary; but before the month was out, he had acquired a comfortable rotundity of person, and something of the sleek and polished look which befits the governor of a gentleman's son. And yet he never lost a certain gravity and reserve of demeanor

which was nearly akin to a mild melancholy. With me, half the time, he was of course intolerably bored, and he must have had hard work to keep from yawning in my face,—which, as he knew I knew, would have been an unwarrantable liberty. At table, with my parents, he seemed to be constantly observing himself and inwardly regulating his words and gestures. The simple truth, I take it, was that he had never sat at a gentleman's table, and although he must have known himself incapable of a real breach of civility,—essentially delicate as he was in his feelings,—he was too proud to run the risk of violating etiquette. My poor mother was a great stickler for ceremony, and she would have had her majordomo to lift the covers, even if she had had nothing to put into the dishes. I remember a cruel rebuke she bestowed upon Coquelin, shortly after his arrival. She could never be brought to forget that he had been picked up, as she said, on the roads. At dinner one day, in the absence of Mlle. de Bergerac, who was indis-

posed, he inadvertently occupied her seat, taking me as a *vis-à-vis* instead of a neighbor. Shortly afterwards, coming to offer wine to my mother, he received for all response a stare so blank, cold, and insolent as to leave no doubt of her estimate of his presumption. In my mother's simple philosophy, Mlle. de Bergerac's seat could be decently occupied only by herself, and in default of her presence should remain conspicuously and sacredly vacant. Dinner at Bergerac was at best, indeed, a cold and dismal ceremony. I see it now,—the great dining-room, with its high windows and their faded curtains, and the tiles upon the floor, and the immense wainscots, and the great white marble chimney-piece, reaching to the ceiling,—a triumph of delicate carving,—and the panels above the doors, with their *galant* mythological paintings. All this had been the work of my grandfather, during the Regency, who had undertaken to renovate and beautify the château; but his funds had suddenly given out, and we could boast but a desultory ele-

gance. Such talk as passed at table was between my mother and the Baron, and consisted for the most part of a series of insidious attempts on my mother's part to extort information which the latter had no desire, or at least no faculty, to impart. My father was constitutionally taciturn and apathetic, and he invariably made an end of my mother's interrogation by proclaiming that he hated gossip. He liked to take his pleasure and have done with it, or at best, to ruminate his substantial joys within the conservative recesses of his capacious breast. The Baronne's inquisitive tongue was like a lambent flame, flickering over the sides of a rock. She had a passion for the world, and seclusion had only sharpened the edge of her curiosity. She lived on old memories—shabby, tarnished bits of intellectual finery—and vagrant rumors, anecdotes, and scandals.

Once in a while, however, her curiosity held high revel; for once a week we had the Vicomte de Treuil to dine with us. This gentleman was,

although several years my father's junior, his most intimate friend and the only constant visitor at Bergerac. He brought with him a sort of intoxicating perfume of the great world, which I myself was not too young to feel. He had a marvellous fluency of talk; he was polite and elegant; and he was constantly getting letters from Paris, books, newspapers, and prints, and copies of the new songs. When he dined at Bergerac, my mother used to rustle away from table, kissing her hand to him, and actually light-headed from her deep potations of gossip. His conversation was a constant popping of corks. My father and the Vicomte, as I have said, were firm friends,—the firmer for the great diversity of their characters. M. de Bergerac was dark, grave, and taciturn, with a deep, sonorous voice. He had in his nature a touch of melancholy, and, in default of piety, a broad vein of superstition. The foundations of his soul, moreover, I am satisfied, in spite of the somewhat ponderous superstructure, were laid in a soil of rich tenderness

and pity. Gaston de Treuil was of a wholly different temper. He was short and slight, without any color, and with eyes as blue and lustrous as sapphires. He was so careless and gracious and mirthful, that to an unenlightened fancy he seemed the model of a joyous, reckless, gallant, impenitent *veneur*. But it sometimes struck me that, as he revolved an idea in his mind, it produced a certain flinty ring, which suggested that his nature was built, as it were, on rock, and that the bottom of his heart was hard. Young as he was, besides, he had a tired, jaded, exhausted look, which told of his having played high at the game of life, and, very possibly, lost. In fact, it was notorious that M. de Treuil had run through his property, and that his actual business in our neighborhood was to repair the breach in his fortunes by constant attendance on a wealthy kinsman, who occupied an adjacent château, and who was dying of age and his infirmities. But while I thus hint at the existence in his composition of these few base

particles, I should be sorry to represent him as substantially less fair and clear and lustrous than he appeared to be. He possessed an irresistible charm, and that of itself is a virtue. I feel sure, moreover, that my father would never have reconciled himself to a real scantiness of masculine worth. The Vicomte enjoyed, I fancy, the generous energy of my father's good-fellowship, and the Baron's healthy senses were flattered by the exquisite perfume of the other's infallible *savoir-vivre.* I offer a hundred apologies, at any rate, to the Vicomte's luminous shade, that I should have ventured to cast a dingy slur upon his name. History has commemorated it. He perished on the scaffold, and showed that he knew how to die as well as to live. He was the last relic of the lily-handed youth of the *bon temps;* and as he looks at me out of the poignant sadness of the past, with a reproachful glitter in his cold blue eyes, and a scornful smile on his fine lips, I feel that, elegant and silent as he is, he has the last word in our dispute. I shall

think of him henceforth as he appeared one night, or rather one morning, when he came home from a ball with my father, who had brought him to Bergerac to sleep. I had my bed in a closet out of my mother's room, where I lay in a most unwholesome fashion among her old gowns and hoops and cosmetics. My mother slept little; she passed the night in her dressing-gown, bolstered up in her bed, reading novels. The two gentlemen came in at four o'clock in the morning and made their way up to the Baronne's little sitting-room, next to her chamber. I suppose they were highly exhilarated, for they made a great noise of talking and laughing, and my father began to knock at the chamber door. He called out that he had M. de Treuil, and that they were cold and hungry. The Baronne said that she had a fire and they might come in. She was glad enough, poor lady, to get news of the ball, and to catch their impressions before they had been dulled by sleep. So they came in and sat by the fire, and M. de Treuil looked for some wine and

some little cakes where my mother told him. I was wide awake and heard it all. I heard my mother protesting and crying out, and the Vicomte laughing, when he looked into the wrong place; and I am afraid that in my mother's room there were a great many wrong places. Before long, in my little stuffy, dark closet, I began to feel hungry too; whereupon I got out of bed and ventured forth into the room. I remember the whole picture, as one remembers isolated scenes of childhood: my mother's bed, with its great curtains half drawn back at the side, and her little eager face and dark eyes peeping out of the recess; then the two men at the fire,—my father with his hat on, sitting and looking drowsily into the flames, and the Vicomte standing before the hearth, talking, laughing, and gesticulating, with the candlestick in one hand and a glass of wine in the other,—dropping the wax on one side and the wine on the other. He was dressed from head to foot in white velvet and white silk, with embroideries of silver, and an

immense *jabot.* He was very pale, and he looked lighter and slighter and wittier and more elegant than ever. He had a weak voice, and when he laughed, after one feeble little spasm, it went off into nothing, and you only knew he was laughing by his nodding his head and lifting his eyebrows and showing his handsome teeth. My father was in crimson velvet, with tarnished gold facings. My mother bade me get back into bed, but my father took me on his knees and held out my bare feet to the fire. In a little while, from the influence of the heat, he fell asleep in his chair, and I sat in my place and watched M. de Treuil as he stood in the firelight drinking his wine and telling stories to my mother, until at last I too relapsed into the innocence of slumber. They were very good friends, the Vicomte and my mother. He admired the turn of her mind. I remember his telling me several years later, at the time of her death, when I was old enough to understand him, that she was a very brave, keen little woman, and that in her musty soli-

tude of Bergerac she said a great many more good things than the world ever heard of.

During the winter which preceded Coquelin's arrival, M. de Treuil used to show himself at Bergerac in a friendly manner; but about a month before this event, his visits became more frequent and assumed a special import and motive. In a word, my father and his friend between them had conceived it to be a fine thing that the latter should marry Mlle. de Bergerac. Neither from his own nor from his friend's point of view was Gaston de Treuil a marrying man or a desirable *parti.* He was too fond of pleasure to conciliate a rich wife, and too poor to support a penniless one. But I fancy that my father was of the opinion that if the Vicomte came into his kinsman's property, the best way to insure the preservation of it, and to attach him to his duties and responsibilities, would be to unite him to an amiable girl, who might remind him of the beauty of a domestic life and lend him courage to mend his ways.

As far as the Vicomte was concerned, this was assuredly a benevolent scheme, but it seems to me that it made small account of the young girl's own happiness. M. de Treuil was supposed, in the matter of women, to have known everything that can be known, and to be as *blasé* with regard to their charms as he was proof against their influence. And, in fact, his manner of dealing with women, and of discussing them, indicated a profound disenchantment,—no bravado of contempt, no affectation of cynicism, but a cold, civil, absolute lassitude. A simply charming woman, therefore, would never have served the purpose of my father's theory. A very sound and liberal instinct led him to direct his thoughts to his sister. There were, of course, various auxiliary reasons for such disposal of Mlle. de Bergerac's hand. She was now a woman grown, and she had as yet received no decent proposals. She had no marriage portion of her own, and my father had no means to endow her. Her beauty, moreover, could hardly be called a dowry. It was

without those vulgar allurements which, for many a poor girl, replace the glitter of cash. If within a very few years more she had not succeeded in establishing herself creditably in the world, nothing would be left for her but to withdraw from it, and to pledge her virgin faith to the chilly sanctity of a cloister. I was destined in the course of time to assume the lordship and the slender revenues of Bergerac, and it was not to be expected that I should be burdened on the very threshold of life with the maintenance of a dowerless maiden aunt. A marriage with M. de Treuil would be in all senses a creditable match, and, in the event of his becoming his kinsman's legatee, a thoroughly comfortable one.

It was some time before the color of my father's intentions, and the milder hue of the Vicomte's acquiescence, began to show in our common daylight. It is not the custom, as you know, in our excellent France, to admit a lover on probation. He is expected to make up his mind on a view of the young lady's endow-

ments, and to content himself before marriage with the bare cognition of her face. It is not thought decent (and there is certainly reason in it) that he should dally with his draught, and hold it to the light, and let the sun play through it, before carrying it to his lips. It was only on the ground of my father's warm good-will to Gaston de Treuil, and the latter's affectionate respect for the Baron, that the Vicomte was allowed to appear as a lover, before making his proposals in form. M. de Treuil, in fact, proceeded gradually, and made his approaches from a great distance. It was not for several weeks, therefore, that Mlle. de Bergerac became aware of them. And now, as this dear young girl steps into my story, where, I ask you, shall I find words to describe the broad loveliness of her person, to hint at the perfect beauty of her mind, to suggest the sweet mystery of her first suspicion of being sought, from afar, in marriage? Not in my fancy, surely; for there I should disinter the flimsy elements and tarnished properties of a

superannuated comic opera. My taste, my son, was formed once for all fifty years ago. But if I wish to call up Mlle. de Bergerac, I must turn to my earliest memories, and delve in the sweet-smelling virgin soil of my heart. For Mlle. de Bergerac is no misty sylphid nor romantic moonlit nymph. She rises before me now, glowing with life, with the sound of her voice just dying in the air,—the more living for the mark of her crimson death-stain.

There was every good reason why her dawning consciousness of M. de Treuil's attentions —although these were little more than projected as yet—should have produced a serious tremor in her heart. It was not that she was aught of a coquette; I honestly believe that there was no latent coquetry in her nature. At all events, whatever she might have become after knowing M. de Treuil, she was no coquette to speak of in her ignorance. Her ignorance of men, in truth, was great. For the Vicomte himself, she had as yet known him only distantly, formally, as a gentleman of

rank and fashion; and for others of his quality, she had seen but a small number, and not seen them intimately. These few words suffice to indicate that my aunt led a life of unbroken monotony. Once a year she spent six weeks with certain ladies of the Visitation, in whose convent she had received her education, and of whom she continued to be very fond. Half a dozen times in the twelvemonth she went to a hall, under convoy of some haply ungrudging *châtelaine*. Two or three times a month, she received a visit at Bergerac. The rest of the time she paced, with the grace of an angel and the patience of a woman, the dreary corridors and unclipt garden walks of Bergerac. The discovery, then, that the brilliant Vicomte de Treuil was likely to make a proposal for her hand was an event of no small importance. With precisely what feelings she awaited its coming, I am unable to tell; but I have no hesitation in saying that even at this moment (that is, in less than a month after my tutor's arrival) her feelings were strongly

nodified by her acquaintance with Pierre Coquelin.

The word "acquaintance" perhaps exaggerates Mlle. de Bergerac's relation to this excellent young man. Twice a day she sat facing him at table, and half a dozen times a week she met him on the staircase, in the saloon, or in the park. Coquelin had been accommodated with an apartment in a small untenanted pavilion, within the enclosure of our domain, and except at meals, and when his presence was especially requested at the château, he confined himself to his own precinct. It was there, morning and evening, that I took my lesson. It was impossible, therefore, that an intimacy should have arisen between these two young persons, equally separated as they were by material and conventional barriers. Nevertheless, as the sequel proved, Coquelin must, by his mere presence, have begun very soon to exert a subtle action on Mlle. de Bergerac's thoughts. As for the young girl's influence on Coquelin, it is my belief that he fell in love with

her the very first moment he beheld her,—that morning when he trudged wearily up our avenue. I need certainly make no apology for the poor fellow's audacity. You tell me that you fell in love at first sight with my aunt's portrait; you will readily excuse the poor youth for having been smitten with the original. It is less logical perhaps, but it is certainly no less natural, that Mlle. de Bergerac should have ventured to think of my governor as a decidedly interesting fellow. She saw so few men that one the more or the less made a very great difference. Coquelin's importance, moreover, was increased rather than diminished by the fact that, as I may say, he was a son of the soil. Marked as he was, in aspect and utterance, with the genuine plebeian stamp, he opened a way for the girl's fancy into a vague, unknown world. He stirred her imagination, I conceive, in very much the same way as such a man as Gaston de Treuil would have stirred—actually had stirred, of course—the grosser sensibilities of many a little *bourgeoise*. Mlle. de

Bergerac was so thoroughly at peace with the consequences of her social position, so little inclined to derogate in act or in thought from the perfect dignity of her birth, that with the best conscience in the world, she entertained, as they came, the feelings provoked by Coquelin's manly virtues and graces. She had been educated in the faith that *noblesse oblige,* and she had seen none but gentlefolks and peasants. I think that she felt a vague, unavowed curiosity to see what sort of a figure you might make when you were under no obligations to nobleness. I think, finally, that unconsciously and in the interest simply of her unsubstantial dreams, (for in those long summer days at Bergerac, without finery, without visits, music, or books, or anything that a well-to-do grocer's daughter enjoys at the present day, she must, unless she was a far greater simpleton than I wish you to suppose, have spun a thousand airy, idle visions,) she contrasted Pierre Coquelin with the Vicomte de Treuil. I protest that I don't see how Coquelin bore the contrast. I

frankly admit that, in her place, I would have given all my admiration to the Vicomte. At all events, the chief result of any such comparison must have been to show how, in spite of real trials and troubles, Coquelin had retained a certain masculine freshness and elasticity, and how, without any sorrows but those of his own wanton making, the Vicomte had utterly rubbed off his primal bloom of manhood. There was that about Gaston de Treuil that reminded you of an actor by daylight. His little row of foot-lights had burned itself out. But this is assuredly a more pedantic view of the case than any that Mlle. de Bergerac was capable of taking. The Vicomte had but to learn his part and declaim it, and the illusion was complete.

Mlle. de Bergerac may really have been a great simpleton, and my theory of her feelings —vague and imperfect as it is—may be put together quite after the fact. But I see you protest; you glance at the picture; you frown. *C'est bon;* give me your hand. She received

the Vicomte's gallantries, then, with a modest, conscious dignity, and courtesied to exactly the proper depth when he made her one of his inimitable bows.

One evening—it was, I think, about ten days after Coquelin's arrival—she was sitting reading to my mother, who was ill in bed. The Vicomte had been dining with us, and after dinner we had gone into the drawing-room. At the drawing-room door Coquelin had made his bow to my father, and carried me off to his own apartment. Mlle. de Bergerac and the two gentlemen had gone into the drawing-room together. At dusk I had come back to the château, and, going up to my mother, had found her in company with her sister-in-law. In a few moments my father came in, looking stern and black.

"Sister," he cried, "why did you leave us alone in the drawing-room? Didn't you see I wanted you to stay?"

Mlle. de Bergerac laid down her book and looked at her brother before answering. "I

had to come to my sister," she said: "I couldn't leave her alone."

My mother, I'm sorry to say, was not always just to my aunt. She used to lose patience with her sister's want of coquetry, of ambition, of desire to make much of herself. She divined wherein my aunt had offended. "You're very devoted to your sister, suddenly," she said. "There are duties and duties, mademoiselle. I'm very much obliged to you for reading to me. You can put down the book."

"The Vicomte swore very hard when you went out," my father went on.

Mlle. de Bergerac laid aside her book. "Dear me!" she said, "if he was going to swear, it's very well I went."

"Are you afraid of the Vicomte?" said my mother. "You're twenty-two years old. You're not a little girl."

"Is she twenty-two?" cried my father. "I told him she was twenty-one."

"Frankly, brother," said Mlle. de Bergerac,

'what does he want? Does he want to marry me?"

My father stared a moment. *"Pardieu!"* he cried.

"She looks as if she didn't believe it," said my mother. "Pray, did you ever ask him?"

"No, madam; did you? You are very kind." Mlle. de Bergerac was excited; her cheeks flushed.

"In the course of time," said my father, gravely, "the Vicomte proposes to demand your hand."

"What is he waiting for?" asked Mlle. de Bergerac, simply.

"Fi donc, mademoiselle!" cried my mother.

"He is waiting for M. de Sorbières to die," said I, who had got this bit of news from my mother's waiting-woman.

My father stared at me, half angrily; and then,—"He expects to inherit," he said, boldly. "It's a very fine property."

"He would have done better, it seems to me," rejoined Mlle. de Bergerac, after a pause,

"to wait till he had actually come into possession of it."

"M. de Sorbières," cried my father, "has given him his word a dozen times over. Besides, the Vicomte loves you."

Mlle. de Bergerac blushed, with a little smile, and as she did so her eyes fell on mine. I was standing gazing at her as a child gazes at a familiar friend who is presented to him in a new light. She put out her hand and drew me towards her. "The truth comes out of the mouths of children," she said. "Chevalier, does he love me?"

"Stuff!" cried the Baronne; "one doesn't speak to children of such things. A young girl should believe what she's told. I believed my mother when she told me that your brother loved me. He didn't, but I believed it, and as far as I know I'm none the worse for it."

For ten days after this I heard nothing more of Mlle. de Bergerac's marriage, and I suppose that, childlike, I ceased to think of what I had already heard. One evening, about mid-

summer, M. de Treuil came over to supper, and announced that he was about to set out in company with poor M. de Sorbières for some mineral springs in the South, by the use of which the latter hoped to prolong his life.

I remember that, while we sat at table, Coquelin was appealed to as an authority upon some topic broached by the Vicomte, on which he found himself at variance with my father. It was the first time, I fancy, that he had been so honored and that his opinions had been deemed worth hearing. The point under discussion must have related to the history of the American War, for Coquelin spoke with the firmness and fulness warranted by personal knowledge. I fancy that he was a little frightened by the sound of his own voice, but he acquitted himself with perfect good grace and success. We all sat attentive; my mother even staring a little, surprised to find in a beggarly pedagogue a perfect *beau diseur*. My father, as became so great a gentleman, knew by a certain rough instinct when a man had something

amusing to say. He leaned back, with his hands in his pockets, listening and paying the poor fellow the tribute of a half-puzzled frown. The Vicomte, like a man of taste, was charmed. He told stories himself, he was a good judge.

After supper we went out on the terrace. It was a perfect summer night, neither too warm nor too cool. There was no moon, but the stars flung down their languid light, and the earth, with its great dark masses of vegetation and the gently swaying tree-tops, seemed to answer back in a thousand vague perfumes. Somewhere, close at hand, out of an enchanted tree, a nightingale raved and carolled in delirious music. We had the good taste to listen in silence. My mother sat down on a bench against the house, and put out her hand and made my father sit beside her. Mlle. de Bergerac strolled to the edge of the terrace, and leaned against the balustrade, whither M. de Treuil soon followed her. She stood motionless, with her head raised, intent upon the music. The Vicomte seated himself upon the

parapet, with his face towards her and his arms folded. He may perhaps have been talking, under cover of the nightingale. Coquelin seated himself near the other end of the terrace, and drew me between his knees. At last the nightingale ceased. Coquelin got up, and bade good night to the company, and made his way across the park to his lodge. I went over to my aunt and the Vicomte.

"M. Coquelin is a clever man," said the Vicomte, as he disappeared down the avenue. "He spoke very well this evening."

"He never spoke so much before," said I. "He's very shy."

"I think," said my aunt, "he's a little proud."

"I don't understand," said the Vicomte, "how a man with any pride can put up with the place of a tutor. I had rather dig in the fields."

"The Chevalier is much obliged to you," said my aunt, laughing. "In fact, M. Coquelin has to dig a little, hasn't he, Chevalier?"

"Not at all," said I. "But he keeps some plants in pots."

At this my aunt and the Vicomte began to laugh. "He keeps one precious plant," cried my aunt, tapping my face with her fan.

At this moment my mother called me away. "He makes them laugh," I heard her say to my father, as I went to her.

"She had better laugh about it than cry," said my father.

Before long, Mlle. de Bergerac and her companion came back toward the house.

"M. le Vicomte, brother," said my aunt, "invites me to go down and walk in the park. May I accept?"

"By all means," said my father. "You may go with the Vicomte as you would go with me."

"Ah!" said the Vicomte.

"Come then, Chevalier," said my aunt. "In my turn, I invite you."

"My son," said the Baronne, "I forbid you."

"But my brother says," rejoined Mlle. de Bergerac, "that I may go with M. de Treuil as

I would go with himself. He would not object to my taking my nephew." And she put out her hand.

"One would think," said my mother, "that you were setting out for Siberia."

"For Siberia!" cried the Vicomte, laughing; "O no!"

I paused, undecided. But my father gave me a push. "After all," he said, "it's better."

When I overtook my aunt and her lover, the latter, losing no time, appeared to have come quite to the point.

"Your brother tells me, mademoiselle," he had begun, "that he has spoken to you."

The young girl was silent.

"You may be indifferent," pursued the Vicomte, "but I can't believe you're ignorant."

"My brother has spoken to me," said Mlle. de Bergerac at last, with an apparent effort,— "my brother has spoken to me of his project."

"I'm very glad he seemed to you to have espoused my cause so warmly that you call it his own. I did my best to convince him that I pos-

sess what a person of your merit is entitled to exact of the man who asks her hand. In doing so, I almost convinced myself. The point is now to convince you."

"I listen."

"You admit, then, that your mind is not made up in advance against me."

"Mon Dieu!" cried my aunt, with some emphasis, "a poor girl like me doesn't make up her mind. You frighten me, Vicomte. This is a serious question. I have the misfortune to have no mother. I can only pray God. But prayer helps me not to choose, but only to be resigned."

"Pray often, then, mademoiselle. I'm not an arrogant lover, and since I have known you a little better, I have lost all my vanity. I'm not a good man nor a wise one. I have no doubt you think me very light and foolish, but you can't begin to know how light and foolish I am. Marry me and you'll never know. If you don't marry me, I'm afraid you'll never marry."

"You're very frank, Vicomte. If you think I'm afraid of never marrying, you're mistaken. One can be very happy as an old maid. I spend six weeks every year with the ladies of the Visitation. Several of them are excellent women, charming women. They read, they educate young girls, they visit the poor—"

The Vicomte broke into a laugh. "They get up at five o'clock in the morning; they breakfast on boiled cabbage; they make flannel waistcoats, and very good sweetmeats! Why do you talk so, mademoiselle? Why do you say that you would like to lead such a life? One might almost believe it is coquetry. *Tenez,* I believe it's ignorance,—ignorance of your own feelings, your own nature, and your own needs." M. de Treuil paused a moment, and, although I had a very imperfect notion of the meaning of his words, I remember being struck with the vehement look of his pale face, which seemed fairly to glow in the darkness. Plainly, he was in love. "You are not made for solitude," he went on; "you are not made

to be buried in a dingy old château, in the depths of a ridiculous province. You are made for the world, for the court, for pleasure, to be loved, admired, and envied. No, you don't know yourself, nor does Bergerac know you, nor his wife! I, at least, appreciate you. I know that you are supremely beautiful—"

"Vicomte," said Mlle. de Bergerac, "you forget—the child."

"Hang the child! Why did you bring him along? *You* are no child. You can understand me. You are a woman, full of intelligence and goodness and beauty. They don't know you here, they think you a little demoiselle in pinafores. Before Heaven, mademoiselle, there is that about you,—I see it, I feel it here at your side, in this rustling darkness—there is that about you that a man would gladly die for."

Mlle. de Bergerac interrupted him with energy. "You talk extravagantly. I don't understand you; you frighten me."

"I talk as I feel. I frighten you? So much

the better. I wish to stir your heart and get some answer to the passion of my own."

Mlle. de Bergerac was silent a moment, as if collecting her thoughts. "If I talk with you on this subject, I must do it with my wits about me," she said at last. "I must know exactly what we each mean."

"It's plain then that I can't hope to inspire you with any degree of affection."

"One doesn't promise to love, Vicomte; I can only answer for the present. My heart is so full of good wishes toward you that it costs me comparatively little to say I don't love you."

"And anything I may say of my own feelings will make no difference to you?"

"You have said you love me. Let it rest there."

"But you look as if you doubted my word."

"You can't see how I look; Vicomte, I believe you."

"Well then, there is one point gained. Let us pass to the others. I'm thirty years old. I

have a very good name and a very bad reputation. I honestly believe that, though I've fallen below my birth, I've kept above my fame. I believe that I have no vices of temper; I'm neither brutal, nor jealous, nor miserly. As for my fortune, I'm obliged to admit that it consists chiefly in my expectations. My actual property is about equal to your brother's and you know how your sister-in-law is obliged to live. My expectations are thought particularly good. My great-uncle, M. de Sorbières, possesses, chiefly in landed estates, a fortune of some three millions of livres. I have no important competitors, either in blood or devotion. He is eighty-seven years old and paralytic, and within the past year I have been laying siege to his favor with such constancy that his surrender, like his extinction, is only a question of time. I received yesterday a summons to go with him to the Pyrenees, to drink certain medicinal waters. The least he can do, on my return, is to make me a handsome allowance, which with my own revenues will make—*en*

attendant better things—a sufficient income for a reasonable couple."

There was a pause of some moments, during which we slowly walked along in the obstructed starlight, the silence broken only by the train of my aunt's dress brushing against the twigs and pebbles.

"What a pity," she said, at last, "that you are not able to speak of all this good fortune as in the present rather than in the future."

"There it is! Until I came to know you, I had no thoughts of marriage. What did I want of wealth? If five years ago I had foreseen this moment, I should stand here with something better than promises."

"Well, Vicomte," pursued the young girl, with singular composure, "you do me the honor to think very well of me: I hope you will not be vexed to find that prudence is one of my virtues. If I marry, I wish to marry well. It's not only the husband, but the marriage that counts. In accepting you as you stand, I

should make neither a sentimental match nor a brilliant one."

"Excellent. I love you, prudence and all. Say, then, that I present myself here three months hence with the titles and tokens of property amounting to a million and a half of livres, will you consider that I am a *parti* sufficiently brilliant to make you forget that you don't love me?"

"I should never forget that."

"Well, nor I either. It makes a sort of sorrowful harmony! If three months hence, I repeat, I offer you a fortune instead of this poor empty hand, will you accept the one for the sake of the other?"

My aunt stopped short in the path. "I hope, Vicomte," she said, with much apparent simplicity, "that you are going to do nothing indelicate."

"God forbid, mademoiselle! It shall be a clean hand and a clean fortune."

"If you ask then a promise, a pledge—"

"You'll not give it. I ask then only for a little hope. Give it in what form you will."

We walked a few steps farther and came out from among the shadows, beneath the open sky. The voice of M. de Treuil, as he uttered these words, was low and deep and tender and full of entreaty. Mlle. de Bergerac cannot but have been deeply moved. I think she was somewhat awe-struck at having called up such a force of devotion in a nature deemed cold and inconstant. She put out her hand. "I wish success to any honorable efforts. In any case you will be happier for your wealth. In one case it will get you a wife, and in the other it will console you."

"Console me! I shall hate it, despise it, and throw it into the sea!"

Mlle. de Bergerac had no intention, of course, of leaving her companion under an illusion. "Ah, but understand, Vicomte," she said, "I make no promise. My brother claims the right to bestow my hand. If he wishes our

marriage now, of course he will wish it three months hence. I have never gainsaid him."

"From now to three months a great deal may happen."

"To you, perhaps, but not to me."

"Are you going to your friends of the Visitation?"

"No, indeed. I have no wish to spend the summer in a cloister. I prefer the green fields."

"Well, then *va* for the green fields! They're the next best thing. I recommend you to the Chevalier's protection."

We had made half the circuit of the park, and turned into an alley which stretched away towards the house, and about midway in its course separated into two paths, one leading to the main avenue, and the other to the little pavilion inhabited by Coquelin. At the point where the alley was divided stood an enormous oak of great circumference, with a circular bench surrounding its trunk. It occupied, I believe, the central point of the whole domain.

As we reached the oak, I looked down along the footpath towards the pavilion, and saw Coquelin's light shining in one of the windows. I immediately proposed that we should pay him a visit. My aunt objected, on the ground that he was doubtless busy and would not thank us for interrupting him. And then, when I insisted, she said it was not proper.

"How not proper?"

"It's not proper for me. A lady doesn't visit young men in their own apartments."

At this the Vicomte cried out. He was partly amused, I think, at my aunt's attaching any compromising power to poor little Coquelin, and partly annoyed at her not considering his own company, in view of his pretensions, a sufficient guaranty.

"I should think," he said, "that with the Chevalier and me you might venture—"

"As you please, then," said my aunt. And I accordingly led the way to my governor's abode.

It was a small edifice of a single floor, stand-

ing prettily enough among the trees, and still habitable, although very much in disrepair. It had been built by that same ancestor to whom Bergerac was indebted, in the absence of several of the necessities of life, for many of its elegant superfluities, and had been designed, I suppose, as a scene of pleasure,—such pleasure as he preferred to celebrate elsewhere than beneath the roof of his domicile. Whether it had ever been used I know not; but it certainly had very little of the look of a pleasure-house. Such furniture as it had once possessed had long since been transferred to the needy saloons of the château, and it now looked dark and bare and cold. In front, the shrubbery had been left to grow thick and wild and almost totally to exclude the light from the windows; but behind, outside of the two rooms which he occupied, and which had been provided from the château with the articles necessary for comfort, Coquelin had obtained my father's permission to effect a great clearance in the foliage, and he now enjoyed plenty of sunlight and a

charming view of the neighboring country. It was in the larger of these two rooms, arranged as a sort of study, that we found him.

He seemed surprised and somewhat confused by our visit, but he very soon recovered himself sufficiently to do the honors of his little establishment.

"It was an idea of my nephew," said Mlle. de Bergerac. "We were walking in the park, and he saw your light. Now that we are here, Chevalier, what would you have us do?"

"M. Coquelin has some very pretty things to show you," said I.

Coquelin turned very red. "Pretty things, Chevalier? Pray, what do you mean? I have some of your nephew's copy-books," he said, turning to my aunt.

"Nay, you have some of your own," I cried. "He has books full of drawings, made by himself."

"Ah, you draw?" said the Vicomte.

"M. le Chevalier does me the honor to think

so. My drawings are meant for no critics but children."

"In the way of criticism," said my aunt, gently, "we too are children." Her beautiful eyes, as she uttered these words, must have been quite as gentle as her voice. Coquelin looked at her, thinking very modestly of his little pictures, but loth to refuse the first request she had ever made him.

"Show them, at any rate," said the Vicomte, in a somewhat peremptory tone. In those days, you see, a man occupying Coquelin's place was expected to hold all his faculties and talents at the disposal of his patron, and it was thought an unwarrantable piece of assumption that he should cultivate any of the arts for his own peculiar delectation. In withholding his drawings, therefore, it may have seemed to the Vicomte that Coquelin was unfaithful to the service to which he was held,—that, namely, of instructing, diverting, and edifying the household of Bergerac. Coquelin went to a little cupboard in the wall, and took out three small

albums and a couple of portfolios. Mlle. de Bergerac sat down at the table, and Coquelin drew up the lamp and placed his drawings before her. He turned them over, and gave such explanations as seemed necessary. I have only my childish impressions of the character of these sketches, which, in my eyes, of course, seemed prodigiously clever. What the judgment of my companions was worth I know not, but they appeared very well pleased. The Vicomte probably knew a good sketch from a poor one, and he very good-naturedly pronounced my tutor an extremely knowing fellow. Coquelin had drawn anything and everything,—peasants and dumb brutes, landscapes and Parisian types and figures, taken indifferently from high and low life. But the best pieces in the collection were a series of illustrations and reminiscences of his adventures with the American army, and of the figures and episodes he had observed in the Colonies. They were for the most part rudely enough executed, owing to his want of time and mate-

rials, but they were full of *finesse* and character. M. de Treuil was very much amused at the rude equipments of your ancestors. There were sketches of the enemy too, whom Coquelin had apparently not been afraid to look in the face. While he was turning over these designs for Mlle. de Bergerac, the Vicomte took up one of his portfolios, and, after a short inspection, drew from it, with a cry of surprise, a large portrait in pen and ink.

"Tiens!" said I; "it's my aunt!"

Coquelin turned pale. Mlle. de Bergerac looked at him, and turned the least bit red. As for the Vicomte, he never changed color. There was no eluding the fact that it was a likeness, and Coquelin had to pay the penalty of his skill.

"I didn't know," he said, at random, "that it was in that portfolio. Do you recognize it, mademoiselle?"

"Ah," said the Vicomte, dryly, "M. Coquelin meant to hide it."

"It's too pretty to hide," said my aunt; "and yet it's too pretty to show. It's flattered."

"Why should I have flattered you, mademoiselle?" asked Coquelin. "You were never to see it."

"That's what it is, mademoiselle," said the Vicomte, "to have such dazzling beauty. It penetrates the world. Who knows where you'll find it reflected next?"

However pretty a compliment this may have been to Mlle. de Bergerac, it was decidedly a back-handed blow to Coquelin. The young girl perceived that he felt it.

She rose to her feet. "My beauty," she said, with a slight tremor in her voice, "would be a small thing without M. Coquelin's talent. We are much obliged to you. I hope that you'll bring your pictures to the château, so that we may look at the rest."

"Are you going to leave him this?" asked M. de Treuil, holding up the portrait.

"If M. Coquelin will give it to me, I shall be very glad to have it."

"One doesn't keep one's own portrait," said the Vicomte. "It ought to belong to me." In those days, before the invention of our sublime machinery for the reproduction of the human face, a young fellow was very glad to have his mistress's likeness in pen and ink.

But Coquelin had no idea of contributing to the Vicomte's gallery. "Excuse me," he said, gently, but looking the nobleman in the face. "The picture isn't good enough for Mlle. de Bergerac, but it's too good for any one else"; and he drew it out of the other's hands, tore it across, and applied it to the flame of the lamp.

We went back to the château in silence. The drawing-room was empty; but as we went in, the Vicomte took a lighted candle from a table and raised it to the young girl's face. *"Parbleu!"* he exclaimed, "the vagabond had looked at you to good purpose!"

Mlle. de Bergerac gave a half-confused laugh. "At any rate," she said, "he didn't hold a candle to me as if I were my old smoke-stained grandame, yonder!" and she blew out

the light. "I'll call my brother," she said, preparing to retire.

"A moment," said her lover; "I shall not see you for some weeks. I shall start to-morrow with my uncle. I shall think of you by day, and dream of you by night. And meanwhile I shall very much doubt whether you think of me."

Mlle. de Bergerac smiled. "Doubt, doubt. It will help you to pass the time. With faith alone it would hang very heavy."

"It seems hard," pursued M. de Treuil, "that I should give you so many pledges, and that you should give me none."

"I give all I ask."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, ask for something!"

"Your kind words are all I want."

"Then give me some kind word yourself."

"What shall I say, Vicomte?"

"Say,—say that you'll wait for me."

They were standing in the centre of the great saloon, their figures reflected by the light

of a couple of candles in the shining inlaid floor. Mlle. de Bergerac walked away a few steps with a look of agitation. Then turning about, "Vicomte," she asked, in a deep, full voice, "do you truly love me?"

"Ah, Gabrielle!" cried the young man.

I take it that no woman can hear her baptismal name uttered for the first time as that of Mlle. de Bergerac then came from her suitor's lips without being thrilled with joy and pride.

"Well, M. de Treuil," she said, "I will wait for you."

PART II

I REMEMBER distinctly the incidents of that summer at Bergerac; or at least its general character, its tone. It was a hot, dry season; we lived with doors and windows open. M. Coquelin suffered very much from the heat, and sometimes, for days together, my lessons were suspended. We put our books away and rambled out for a long day in the fields. My tutor was perfectly faithful; he never allowed me to wander beyond call. I was very fond of fishing, and I used to sit for hours, like a little old man, with my legs dangling over the bank of our slender river, patiently awaiting the bite that so seldom came. Near at hand, in the shade, stretched at his length on the grass, Coquelin read and re-read one of his half dozen Greek and Latin poets. If we had walked far from home, we used to go and ask for some dinner at the hut of a

neighboring peasant. For a very small coin we got enough bread and cheese and small fruit to keep us over till supper. The peasants, stupid and squalid as they were, always received us civilly enough, though on Coquelin's account quite as much as on my own. He addressed them with an easy familiarity, which made them feel, I suppose, that he was, if not quite one of themselves, at least by birth and sympathies much nearer to them than to the future Baron de Bergerac. He gave me in the course of these walks a great deal of good advice; and without perverting my signorial morals or instilling any notions that were treason to my rank and position, he kindled in my childish breast a little democratic flame which has never quite become extinct. He taught me the beauty of humanity, justice, and tolerance; and whenever he detected me in a precocious attempt to assert my baronial rights over the wretched little *manants* who crossed my path, he gave me morally a very hard drubbing. He had none of the base complaisance and cynical

ıonchalance of the traditional tutor of our old ıovels and comedies. Later in life I might ıave found him too rigorous a moralist; but n those days I liked him all the better for let-ing me sometimes feel the curb. It gave me ı highly agreeable sense of importance and naturity. It was a tribute to half-divined pos-ıibilities of naughtiness. In the afternoon, when I was tired of fishing, he would lie with ıis thumb in his book and his eyes half closed ınd tell me fairy-tales till the eyes of both of ıs closed together. Do the instructors of youth ıowadays condescend to the fairy-tale pure ınd simple? Coquelin's stories belonged to the ›ld, old world: no political economy, no phys-cs, no application to anything in life. Do you ·emember in Doré's illustrations to Perrault's ;ales, the picture of the enchanted castle of the Sleeping Beauty? Back in the distance, in the ›osom of an ancient park and surrounded by thick baronial woods which blacken all the gloomy horizon, on the farther side of a great ıbysmal hollow of tangled forest verdure, rise

the long façade, the moss-grown terraces, the towers, the purple roofs, of a château of the time of Henry IV. Its massive foundations plunge far down into the wild chasm of the woodland, and its cold pinnacles of slate tower upwards, close to the rolling autumn clouds. The afternoon is closing in and a chill October wind is beginning to set the forest a-howling. In the foreground, on an elevation beneath a mighty oak, stand a couple of old woodcutters pointing across into the enchanted distance and answering the questions of the young prince. They are the bent and blackened woodcutters of old France, of La Fontaine's Fables and the *Médecin malgré lui.* What does the castle contain? What secret is locked in its stately walls? What revel is enacted in its long saloons? What strange figures stand aloof from its vacant windows? You ask the question, and the answer is a long revery. I never look at the picture without thinking of those summer afternoons in the woods and of Coquelin's long stories. His fairies were the fairies of the

Grand Siècle, and his princes and shepherds the godsons of Perrault and Madame d'Aulnay. They lived in such palaces and they hunted in such woods.

Mlle. de Bergerac, to all appearance, was not likely to break her promise to M. de Treuil, —for lack of the opportunity, quite as much as of the will. Those bright summer days must have seemed very long to her, and I can't for my life imagine what she did with her time. But she, too, as she had told the Vicomte, was very fond of the green fields; and although she never wandered very far from the house, she spent many an hour in the open air. Neither here nor within doors was she likely to encounter the happy man of whom the Vicomte might be jealous. Mlle. de Bergerac had a friend, a single intimate friend, who came sometimes to pass the day with her, and whose visits she occasionally returned. Marie de Chalais, the granddaughter of the Marquis de Chalais, who lived some ten miles away, was in all respects the exact counterpart and foil of my aunt. She

was extremely plain, but with that sprightly, highly seasoned ugliness which is often so agreeable to men. Short, spare, swarthy, light, with an immense mouth, a most impertinent little nose, an imperceptible foot, a charming hand, and a delightful voice, she was, in spite of her great name and her fine clothes, the very ideal of the old stage *soubrette*. Frequently, indeed, in her dress and manner, she used to provoke a comparison with this incomparable type. A cap, an apron, and a short petticoat were all sufficient; with these and her bold, dark eyes she could impersonate the very genius of impertinence and intrigue. She was a thoroughly light creature, and later in life, after her marriage, she became famous for her ugliness, her witticisms, and her adventures; but that she had a good heart is shown by her real attachment to my aunt. They were forever at cross-purposes, and yet they were excellent friends. When my aunt wished to walk, Mlle. de Chalais wished to sit still; when Mlle. de Chalais wished to laugh, my aunt wished to

meditate; when my aunt wished to talk piety, Mlle. de Chalais wished to talk scandal. Mlle. de Bergerac, however, usually carried the day and set the tune. There was nothing on earth that Marie de Chalais so despised as the green fields; and yet you might have seen her a dozen times that summer wandering over the domain of Bergerac, in a short muslin dress and a straw hat, with her arm entwined about the waist of her more stately friend. We used often to meet them, and as we drew near Mlle. de Chalais would always stop and offer to kiss the Chevalier. By this pretty trick Coquelin was subjected for a few moments to the influence of her innocent *agaçeries;* for rather than have no man at all to prick with the little darts of her coquetry, the poor girl would have gone off and made eyes at the scare-crow in the wheat-field. Coquelin was not at all abashed by her harmless advances; for although, in addressing my aunt, he was apt to lose his voice or his countenance, he often showed a very pretty wit in answering Mlle. de Chalais.

On one occasion she spent several days at Bergerac, and during her stay she proffered an urgent entreaty that my aunt should go back with her to her grandfather's house, where, having no parents, she lived with her governess. Mlle. de Bergerac declined, on the ground of having no gowns fit to visit in; whereupon Mlle. de Chalais went to my mother, begged the gift of an old blue silk dress, and with her own cunning little hands made it over for my aunt's figure. That evening Mlle. de Bergerac appeared at supper in this renovated garment,—the first silk gown she had ever worn. Mlle. de Chalais had also dressed her hair, and decked her out with a number of trinkets and furbelows; and when the two came into the room together, they reminded me of the beautiful Duchess in Don Quixote, followed by a little dark-visaged Spanish waiting-maid. The next morning Coquelin and I rambled off as usual in search of adventures, and the day after that they were to leave the château. Whether we met with

any adventures or not I forget; but we found ourselves at dinner-time at some distance from home, very hungry after a long tramp. We directed our steps to a little roadside hovel, where we had already purchased hospitality, and made our way in unannounced. We were somewhat surprised at the scene that met our eyes.

On a wretched bed at the farther end of the hut lay the master of the household, a young peasant whom we had seen a fortnight before in full health and vigor. At the head of the bed stood his wife, moaning, crying, and wringing her hands. Hanging about her, clinging to her skirts, and adding their piping cries to her own lamentations, were four little children, unwashed, unfed, and half clad. At the foot, facing the dying man, knelt his old mother—a horrible hag, so bent and brown and wrinkled with labor and age that there was nothing womanly left of her but her coarse, rude dress and cap, nothing of maternity but her sobs. Beside the pillow stood the priest, who had ap-

parently just discharged the last offices of the Church. On the other side, on her knees, with the poor fellow's hand in her own, knelt Mlle. de Bergerac, like a consoling angel. On a stool near the door, looking on from a distance, sat Mlle. de Chalais, holding a little bleating kid in her arms. When she saw us, she started up. "Ah, M. Coquelin!" she cried, "do persuade Mlle. de Bergerac to leave this horrible place."

I saw Mlle. de Bergerac look at the curé and shake her head, as if to say that it was all over. She rose from her knees and went round to the wife, telling the same tale with her face. The poor, squalid *paysanne* gave a sort of savage, stupid cry, and threw herself and her rags on the young girl's neck. Mlle. de Bergerac caressed her, and whispered heaven knows what divinely simple words of comfort. Then, for the first time, she saw Coquelin and me, and beckoned us to approach.

"Chevalier," she said, still holding the

woman on her breast, "have you got any money?"

At these words the woman raised her head. I signified that I was penniless.

My aunt frowned impatiently. "M. Coquelin, have you?"

Coquelin drew forth a single small piece, all that he possessed; for it was the end of his month. Mlle. de Bergerac took it, and pursued her inquiry.

"Curé, have you any money?"

"Not a sou," said the curé, smiling sweetly.

"Bah!" said Mlle. de Bergerac, with a sort of tragic petulance. "What can I do with twelve sous?"

"Give it all the same," said the woman, doggedly, putting out her hand.

"They want money," said Mlle de Bergerac, lowering her voice to Coquelin. "They have had this great sorrow, but a *louis d'or* would dull the wound. But we're all penniless. O for the sight of a little gold!"

"I have a *louis* at home," said I; and I felt Coquelin lay his hand on my head.

"What was the matter with the husband?" he asked.

"Mon Dieu!" said my aunt, glancing round at the bed. "I don't know."

Coquelin looked at her, half amazed, half worshipping.

"Who are they, these people? What are they?" she asked.

"Mademoiselle," said Coquelin, fervently, "you're an angel!"

"I wish I were," said Mlle. de Bergerac, simply; and she turned to the old mother.

We walked home together,—the curé with Mlle. de Chalais and me, and Mlle. de Bergerac in front with Coquelin. Asking how the two young girls had found their way to the deathbed we had just left, I learned from Mlle. de Chalais that they had set out for a stroll together, and, striking into a footpath across the fields, had gone farther than they supposed, and lost their way. While they were

trying to recover it, they came upon the wretched hut where we had found them, and were struck by the sight of two children, standing crying at the door. Mlle. de Bergerac had stopped and questioned them to ascertain the cause of their sorrow, which with some difficulty she found to be that their father was dying of a fever. Whereupon, in spite of her companion's lively opposition, she had entered the miserable abode, and taken her place at the wretched couch, in the position in which we had discovered her. All this, doubtless, implied no extraordinary merit on Mlle. de Bergerac's part; but it placed her in a gracious, pleasing light.

The next morning the young girls went off in the great coach of M. de Chalais, which had been sent for them overnight, my father riding along as an escort. My aunt was absent a week, and I think I may say we keenly missed her. When I say we, I mean Coquelin and I, and when I say Coquelin and I, I mean Coquelin in particular; for it had come to this,

that my tutor was roundly in love with my aunt. I didn't know it then, of course; but looking back, I see that he must already have been stirred to his soul's depths. Young as I was, moreover, I believe that I even then suspected his passion, and, loving him as I did, watched it with a vague, childish awe and sympathy. My aunt was to me, of course, a very old story, and I am sure she neither charmed nor dazzled my boyish fancy. I was quite too young to apprehend the meaning or the consequences of Coquelin's feelings; but I knew that he had a secret, and I wished him joy of it. He kept so jealous a guard on it that I would have defied my elders to discover the least reason for accusing him; but with a simple child of ten, thinking himself alone and uninterpreted, he showed himself plainly a lover. He was absent, restless, preoccupied; now steeped in languid revery, now pacing up and down with the exaltation of something akin to hope. Hope itself he could never have felt; for it must have seemed to him that his passion was

so audacious as almost to be criminal. Mlle. de Bergerac's absence showed him, I imagine, that to know her had been the event of his life; to see her across the table, to hear her voice, her tread, to pass her, to meet her eye, a deep, consoling, healing joy. It revealed to him the force with which she had grasped his heart, and I think he was half frightened at the energy of his passion.

One evening, while Mlle. de Bergerac was still away, I sat in his window, committing my lesson for the morrow by the waning light. He was walking up and down among the shadows. "Chevalier," said he, suddenly, "what should you do if I were to leave you?"

My poor little heart stood still. "Leave me?" I cried, aghast; "why should you leave me?"

"Why, you know I didn't come to stay forever."

"But you came to stay till I'm a man grown. Don't you like your place?"

"Perfectly."

"Don't you like my father?"

"Your father is excellent."

"And my mother?"

"Your mother is perfect."

"And me, Coquelin?"

"You, Chevalier, are a little goose."

And then, from a sort of unreasoned instinct that Mlle. de Bergerac was somehow connected with his idea of going away, "And my aunt?" I added.

"How, your aunt?"

"Don't you like her?"

Coquelin had stopped in his walk, and stood near me and above me. He looked at me some moments without answering, and then sat down beside me in the window-seat, and laid his hand on my head.

"Chevalier," he said, "I will tell you something."

"Well?" said I, after I had waited some time.

"One of these days you will be a man grown, and I shall have left you long before that.

You'll learn a great many things that you don't know now. You'll learn what a strange, vast world it is, and what strange creatures men are—and women; how strong, how weak, how happy, how unhappy. You'll learn how many feelings and passions they have, and what a power of joy and of suffering. You'll be Baron de Bergerac and master of the château and of this little house. You'll sometimes be very proud of your title, and you'll sometimes feel very sad that it's so little more than a bare title. But neither your pride nor your grief will come to anything beside this, that one day, in the prime of your youth and strength and good looks, you'll see a woman whom you will love more than all these things,—more than your name, your lands, your youth, and strength, and beauty. It happens to all men, especially the good ones, and you'll be a good one. But the woman you love will be far out of your reach. She'll be a princess, perhaps she'll be the Queen. How can a poor little Baron de Bergerac expect her to look at him?

You will give up your life for a touch of her hand; but what will she care for your life or your death? You'll curse your love, and yet you'll bless it, and perhaps—not having your living to get—you'll come up here and shut yourself up with your dreams and regrets. You'll come perhaps into this pavilion, and sit here alone in the twilight. And then, my child, you'll remember this evening; that I foretold it all and gave you my blessing in advance and —kissed you." He bent over, and I felt his burning lips on my forehead.

I understood hardly a word of what he said; but whether it was that I was terrified by his picture of the possible insignificance of a Baron de Bergerac, or that I was vaguely overawed by his deep, solemn tones, I know not; but my eyes very quietly began to emit a flood of tears. The effect of my grief was to induce him to assure me that he had no present intention of leaving me. It was not, of course, till later in life, that, thinking over the situation, I understood his impulse to arrest his hopeless passion

for Mlle. de Bergerac by immediate departure. He was not brave in time.

At the end of a week she returned one evening as we were at supper. She came in with M. de Chalais, an amiable old man, who had been so kind as to accompany her. She greeted us severally, and nodded to Coquelin. She talked, I remember, with great volubility, relating what she had seen and done in her absence, and laughing with extraordinary freedom. As we left the table, she took my hand, and I put out the other and took Coquelin's.

"Has the Chevalier been a good boy?" she asked.

"Perfect," said Coquelin; "but he has wanted his aunt sadly."

"Not at all," said I, resenting the imputation as derogatory to my independence.

"You have had a pleasant week, mademoiselle?" said Coquelin.

"A charming week. And you?"

"M. Coquelin has been very unhappy," said I. "He thought of going away."

"Ah?" said my aunt.

Coquelin was silent.

"You think of going away?"

"I merely spoke of it, mademoiselle. I must go away some time, you know. The Chevalier looks upon me as something eternal."

"What's eternal?" asked the Chevalier.

"There is nothing eternal, my child," said Mlle. de Bergerac. "Nothing lasts more than a moment."

"O," said Coquelin, "I don't agree with you!"

"You don't believe that in this world everything is vain and fleeting and transitory?"

"By no means; I believe in the permanence of many things."

"Of what, for instance?"

"Well, of sentiments and passions."

"Very likely. But not of the hearts that hold them. 'Lovers die, but love survives.' I heard a gentleman say that at Chalais."

"It's better, at least, than if he had put it the other way. But lovers last too. They survive;

they outlive the things that would fain destroy them,—indifference, denial, and despair."

"But meanwhile the loved object disappears. When it isn't one, it's the other."

"O, I admit that it's a shifting world. But I have a philosophy for that."

"I'm curious to know your philosophy."

"It's a very old one. It's simply to make the most of life while it lasts. I'm very fond of life," said Coquelin, laughing.

"I should say that as yet, from what I know of your history, you have had no great reason to be."

"Nay, it's like a cruel mistress," said Coquelin. "When once you love her, she's absolute. Her hard usage doesn't affect you. And certainly I have nothing to complain of now."

"You're happy here then?"

"Profoundly, mademoiselle, in spite of the Chevalier."

"I should suppose that with your tastes you would prefer something more active, more ardent."

"*Mon Dieu,* my tastes are very simple. And then—happiness, *cela ne se raisonne pas.* You don't find it when you go in quest of it. It's like fortune; it comes to you in your sleep."

"I imagine," said Mlle. de Bergerac, "that I was never happy."

"That's a sad story," said Coquelin.

The young girl began to laugh. "And never unhappy."

"Dear me, that's still worse. Never fear, it will come."

"What will come?"

"That which is both bliss and misery at once."

Mlle. de Bergerac hesitated a moment. "And what is this strange thing?" she asked.

On his side Coquelin was silent. "When it comes to you," he said, at last, "you'll tell me what you call it."

About a week after this, at breakfast, in pursuance of an urgent request of mine, Coquelin proposed to my father to allow him to take me to visit the ruins of an ancient feudal castle

ome four leagues distant, which he had observed and explored while he trudged across he country on his way to Bergerac, and which, ndeed, although the taste for ruins was at that ime by no means so general as since the Revolution (when one may say it was in a measure reated), enjoyed a certain notoriety throughout the province. My father good-naturedly consented; and as the distance was too great o be achieved on foot, he placed his two old coach-horses at our service. You know that lthough I affected, in boyish sort, to have been ndifferent to my aunt's absence, I was really very fond of her, and it occurred to me that our excursion would be more solemn and splendid for her taking part in it. So I appealed to my father and asked if Mlle. de Bergerac might be allowed to go with us. What the Baron would have decided had he been left to himself I know not; but happily for our cause my mother cried out that, to her mind, it was highly improper that her sister-in-law should travel twenty miles alone with two young men.

"One of your young men is a child," said my father, "and her nephew into the bargain; and the other,"—and he laughed, coarsely but not ill-humoredly,—"the other is—Coquelin!"

"Coquelin is not a child nor is mademoiselle either," said my mother.

"All the more reason for their going. Gabrielle, will you go?" My father, I fear, was not remarkable in general for his tenderness or his *prévenance* for the poor girl whom fortune had given him to protect; but from time to time he would wake up to a downright sense of kinship and duty, kindled by the pardonable aggressions of my mother, between whom and her sister-in-law there existed a singular antagonism of temper.

Mlle. de Bergerac looked at my father intently and with a little blush. "Yes, brother, I'll go. The Chevalier can take me *en croupe*."

So we started, Coquelin on one horse, and I on the other, with my aunt mounted behind me. Our sport for the first part of the journey consisted chiefly in my urging my beast into a

somewhat ponderous gallop, so as to terrify my aunt, who was not very sure of her seat, and who, at moments, between pleading and laughing, had hard work to preserve her balance. At these times Coquelin would ride close alongside of us, at the same cumbersome pace, declaring himself ready to catch the young girl if she fell. In this way we jolted along, in a cloud of dust, with shouts and laughter.

"Madame the Baronne was wrong," said Coquelin, "in denying that we are children."

"O, this is nothing yet," cried my aunt.

The castle of Fossy lifted its dark and crumbling towers with a decided air of feudal arrogance from the summit of a gentle eminence in the recess of a shallow gorge among the hills. Exactly when it had flourished and when it had decayed I knew not, but in the year of grace of our pilgrimage it was a truly venerable, almost a formidable, ruin. Two great towers were standing,—one of them diminished by half its upper elevation, and the other sadly scathed and shattered, but still exposing its

hoary head to the weather, and offering the sullen hospitality of its empty skull to a colony of swallows. I shall never forget that day at Fossy; it was one of those long raptures of childhood which seem to imprint upon the mind an ineffaceable stain of light. The novelty and mystery of the dilapidated fortress,—its antiquity, its intricacy, its sounding vaults and corridors, its inaccessible heights and impenetrable depths, the broad sunny glare of its grass-grown courts and yards, the twilight of its passages and midnight of its dungeons, and along with all this my freedom to rove and scramble, my perpetual curiosity, my lusty absorption of the sun-warmed air, and the contagion of my companions' careless and sensuous mirth,—all these things combined to make our excursion one of the memorable events of my youth. My two companions accepted the situation and drank in the beauty of the day and the richness of the spot with all my own reckless freedom. Coquelin was half mad with the joy of spending a whole unbroken sum-

mer's day with the woman whom he secretly loved. He was all motion and humor and resonant laughter; and yet intermingled with his random gayety there lurked a solemn sweetness and reticence, a feverish concentration of thought, which to a woman with a woman's senses must have fairly betrayed his passion. Mlle. de Bergerac, without quite putting aside her natural dignity and gravity of mien, lent herself with a charming girlish energy to the undisciplined spirit of the hour.

Our first thoughts, after Coquelin had turned the horses to pasture in one of the grassy courts of the castle, were naturally bestowed upon our little basket of provisions; and our first act was to sit down on a heap of fallen masonry and divide its contents. After that we wandered. We climbed the still practicable staircases, and wedged ourselves into the turrets and strolled through the chambers and halls; we started from their long repose every echo and bat and owl within the innumerable walls.

Finally, after we had rambled a couple of hours, Mlle. de Bergerac betrayed signs of fatigue. Coquelin went with her in search of a place of rest, and I was left to my own devices. For an hour I found plenty of diversion, at the end of which I returned to my friends. I had some difficulty in finding them. They had mounted by an imperfect and somewhat perilous ascent to one of the upper platforms of the castle. Mlle. de Bergerac was sitting in a listless posture on a block of stone, against the wall, in the shadow of the still surviving tower; opposite, in the light, half leaning, half sitting on the parapet of the terrace, was her companion.

"For the last half-hour, mademoiselle," said Coquelin, as I came up, "you've not spoken a word."

"All the morning," said Mlle. de Bergerac, "I've been scrambling and chattering and laughing. Now, by reaction, I'm *triste*."

"I protest, so am I," said Coquelin. "The truth is, this old feudal fortress is a decidedly

melancholy spot. It's haunted with the ghost of the past. It smells of tragedies, sorrows, and cruelties." He uttered these words with singular emphasis. "It's a horrible place," he pursued, with a shudder.

Mlle. de Bergerac began to laugh. "It's odd that we should only just now have discovered it!"

"No, it's like the history of that abominable past of which it's a relic. At the first glance we see nothing but the great proportions, the show, and the splendor; but when we come to explore, we detect a vast underground world of iniquity and suffering. Only half this castle is above the soil; the rest is dungeons and vaults and *oubliettes.*"

"Nevertheless," said the young girl, "I should have liked to live in those old days. Shouldn't you?"

"Verily, no, mademoiselle!" And then after a pause, with a certain irrepressible bitterness: "Life is hard enough now."

Mlle. de Bergerac stared but said nothing.

"In those good old days," Coquelin resumed, "I should have been a brutal, senseless peasant, yoked down like an ox, with my forehead in the soil. Or else I should have been a trembling, groaning, fasting monk, moaning my soul away in the ecstasies of faith."

Mlle. de Bergerac rose and came to the edge of the platform. "Was no other career open in those days?"

"To such a one as me,—no. As I say, mademoiselle, life is hard now, but it was a mere dead weight then. I know it was. I feel in my bones and pulses that awful burden of despair under which my wretched ancestors struggled. *Tenez,* I'm the great man of the race. My father came next; he was one of four brothers, who all thought it a prodigious rise in the world when he became a village tailor. If we had lived five hundred years ago, in the shadow of these great towers, we should never have risen at all. We should have stuck with our feet in the clay. As I'm not a fighting man, I suppose I should have gone into the Church.

If I hadn't died from an overdose of inanition, very likely I might have lived to be a cardinal."

Mlle. de Bergerac leaned against the parapet, and with a meditative droop of the head looked down the little glen toward the plain and the highway. "For myself," she said, "I can imagine very charming things of life in this castle of Fossy."

"For yourself, very likely."

"Fancy the great moat below filled with water and sheeted with lilies, and the drawbridge lowered, and a company of knights riding into the gates. Within, in one of those vaulted, quaintly timbered rooms, the châtelaine stands ready to receive them, with her women, her chaplain, her physician, and her little page. They come clanking up the staircase, with ringing swords, sweeping the ground with their plumes. They are all brave and splendid and fierce, but one of them far more than the rest. They each bend a knee to the lady—"

"But he bends two," cried Coquelin. "They

wander apart into one of those deep embrasures and spin the threads of perfect love. Ah, I could fancy a sweet life, in those days, mademoiselle, if I could only fancy myself a knight!"

"And you can't," said the young girl, gravely, looking at him.

"It's an idle game; it's not worth trying."

"Apparently then, you're a cynic; you have an equally small opinion of the past and the present."

"No; you do me injustice."

"But you say that life is hard."

"I speak not for myself, but for others; for my brothers and sisters and kinsmen in all degrees; for the great mass of *petits gens* of my own class."

"Dear me, M. Coquelin, while you're about it, you can speak for others still; for poor portionless girls, for instance."

"Are they very much to be pitied?"

Mlle. de Bergerac was silent. "After all," she resumed, "they oughtn't to complain."

"Not when they have a great name and beauty," said Coquelin.

"O heaven!" said the young girl, impatiently, and turned away. Coquelin stood watching her, his brow contracted, his lips parted. Presently, she came back. "Perhaps you think," she said, "that I care for my name, —my great name, as you call it."

"Assuredly, I do."

She stood looking at him, blushing a little and frowning. As he said these words, she gave an impatient toss of the head and turned away again. In her hand she carried an ornamented fan, an antiquated and sadly dilapidated instrument. She suddenly raised it above her head, swung it a moment, and threw it far across the parapet. "There goes the name of Bergerac!" she said; and sweeping round, made the young man a very low courtesy.

There was in the whole action a certain passionate freedom which set poor Coquelin's heart a-throbbing. "To have a good name,

mademoiselle," he said, "and to be indifferent to it, is the sign of a noble mind." (In parenthesis, I may say that I think he was quite wrong.)

"It's quite as noble, monsieur," returned my aunt, "to have a small name and not to blush for it."

With these words I fancy they felt as if they had said enough; the conversation was growing rather too pointed.

"I think," said my aunt, "that we had better prepare to go." And she cast a farewell glance at the broad expanse of country which lay stretched out beneath us, striped with the long afternoon shadows.

Coquelin followed the direction of her eyes. "I wish very much," he said, "that before we go we might be able to make our way up into the summit of the great tower. It would be worth the attempt. The view from here, charming as it is, must be only a fragment of what you see from that topmost platform."

"It's not likely," said my aunt, "that the staircase is still in a state to be used."

"Possibly not; but we can see."

"Nay," insisted my aunt, "I'm afraid to trust the Chevalier. There are great breaches in the sides of the ascent, which are so many open doors to destruction."

I strongly opposed this view of the case; but Coquelin, after scanning the elevation of the tower and such of the fissures as were visible from our standpoint, declared that my aunt was right and that it was my duty to comply. "And you, too, mademoiselle," he said, "had better not try it, unless you pride yourself on your strong head."

"No, indeed, I have a particularly weak one. And you?"

"I confess I'm very curious to see the view. I always want to read to the end of a book, to walk to the turn of a road, and to climb to the top of a building."

"Good," said Mlle. de Bergerac. "We'll wait for you."

Although in a straight line from the spot which we occupied, the distance through the air to the rugged sides of the great cylinder of masonry which frowned above us was not more than thirty yards, Coquelin was obliged, in order to strike at the nearest accessible point the winding staircase which clung to its massive ribs, to retrace his steps through the interior of the castle and make a *détour* of some five minutes' duration. In ten minutes more he showed himself at an aperture in the wall, facing our terrace.

"How do you prosper?" cried my aunt, raising her voice.

"I've mounted eighty steps," he shouted; "I've a hundred more." Presently he appeared again at another opening. "The steps have stopped," he cried.

"You've only to stop too," rejoined Mlle. de Bergerac. Again he was lost to sight and we supposed he was returning. A quarter of an hour elapsed, and we began to wonder at his not having overtaken us, when we heard a loud

call high above our heads. There he stood, on the summit of the edifice, waving his hat. At this point he was so far above us that it was difficult to communicate by sounds, in spite of our curiosity to know how, in the absence of a staircase, he had effected the rest of the ascent. He began to represent, by gestures of pretended rapture, the immensity and beauty of the prospect. Finally Mlle. de Bergerac beckoned to him to descend, and pointed to the declining sun, informing him at the same time that we would go down and meet him in the lower part of the castle. We left the terrace accordingly, and, making the best of our way through the intricate passages of the edifice, at last, not without a feeling of relief, found ourselves on the level earth. We waited quite half an hour without seeing anything of our companion. My aunt, I could see, had become anxious, although she endeavored to appear at her ease. As the time elapsed, however, it became so evident that Coquelin had encountered some serious obstacle to his descent, that Mlle.

de Bergerac proposed we should, in so far as was possible, betake ourselves to his assistance. The point was to approach him within speaking distance.

We entered the body of the castle again, climbed to one of the upper levels, and reached a spot where an extensive destruction of the external wall partially exposed the great tower. As we approached this crumbling breach, Mlle. de Bergerac drew back from its brink with a loud cry of horror. It was not long before I discerned the cause of her movement. The side of the tower visible from where we stood presented a vast yawning fissure, which explained the interruption of the staircase, the latter having fallen for want of support. The central column, to which the steps had been fastened, seemed, nevertheless, still to be erect, and to have formed, with the agglomeration of fallen fragments and various occasional projections of masonry, the means by which Coquelin, with extraordinary courage and skill, had reached the topmost platform.

The ascent, then, had been possible; the descent, curiously enough, he seemed to have found another matter; and after striving in vain to retrace his footsteps, had been obliged to commit himself to the dangerous experiment of passing from the tower to the external surface of the main fortress. He had accomplished half his journey and now stood directly over against us in a posture which caused my young limbs to stiffen with dismay. The point to which he had directed himself was apparently the breach at which we stood; meanwhile he had paused, clinging in mid-air to heaven knows what narrow ledge or flimsy iron clump in the stone-work, and straining his nerves to an agonized tension in the effort not to fall, while his eyes vaguely wandered in quest of another footing. The wall of the castle was so immensely thick, that wherever he could embrace its entire section, progress was comparatively easy; the more especially as, above our heads, this same wall had been demolished in such a way as to maintain a rapid upward

inclination to the point where it communicated with the tower.

I stood staring at Coquelin with my heart in my throat, forgetting (or rather too young to reflect) that the sudden shock of seeing me where I was might prove fatal to his equipoise. He perceived me, however, and tried to smile. "Don't be afraid," he cried, "I'll be with you in a moment." My aunt, who had fallen back, returned to the aperture, and gazed at him with pale cheeks and clasped hands. He made a long step forward, successfully, and, as he recovered himself, caught sight of her face and looked at her with fearful intentness. Then seeing, I suppose, that she was sickened by his insecurity, he disengaged one hand and motioned her back. She retreated, paced in a single moment the length of the enclosure in which we stood, returned and stopped just short of the point at which she would have seen him again. She buried her face in her hands, like one muttering a rapid prayer, and then advanced once more within range of her friend's

vision. As she looked at him, clinging in mid-air and planting step after step on the jagged and treacherous edge of the immense perpendicular chasm, she repressed another loud cry only by thrusting her handkerchief into her mouth. He caught her eyes again, gazed into them with piercing keenness, as if to drink in coolness and confidence, and then, as she closed them again in horror, motioned me with his head to lead her away. She returned to the farther end of the apartment and leaned her head against the wall. I remained staring at poor Coquelin, fascinated by the spectacle of his mingled danger and courage. Inch by inch, yard by yard, I saw him lessen the interval which threatened his life. It was a horrible, beautiful sight. Some five minutes elapsed; they seemed like fifty. The last few yards he accomplished with a rush; he reached the window which was the goal of his efforts, swung himself in and let himself down by a prodigious leap to the level on which we stood. Here he stopped, pale, lacerated, and drenched with

perspiration. He put out his hand to Mlle. de Bergerac, who, at the sound of his steps, had turned herself about. On seeing him she made a few steps forward and burst into tears. I took his extended hand. He bent over me and kissed me, and then giving me a push, "Go and kiss your poor aunt," he said. Mlle. de Bergerac clasped me to her breast with a most convulsive pressure. From that moment till we reached home, there was very little said. Both my companions had matter for silent reflection,—Mlle. de Bergerac in the deep significance of that offered hand, and Coquelin in the rich avowal of her tears.

PART III

A WEEK after this memorable visit to Fossy, in emulation of my good preceptor, I treated my friends, or myself at least, to a five minutes' fright. Wandering beside the river one day when Coquelin had been detained within doors to overlook some accounts for my father, I amused myself, where the bank projected slightly over the stream, with kicking the earth away in fragments, and watching it borne down the current. The result may be anticipated: I came very near going the way of those same fragments. I lost my foothold and fell into the stream, which, however, was so shallow as to offer no great obstacle to self-preservation. I scrambled ashore, wet to the bone, and, feeling rather ashamed of my misadventure, skulked about in the fields for a couple of hours, in my dripping clothes. Finally, there being no sun

and my garments remaining inexorably damp, my teeth began to chatter and my limbs to ache. I went home and surrendered myself. Here again the result may be foreseen: the next day I was laid up with a high fever.

Mlle. de Bergerac, as I afterwards learned, immediately appointed herself my nurse, removed me from my little sleeping-closet to her own room, and watched me with the most tender care. My illness lasted some ten days, my convalescence a week. When I began to mend, my bed was transferred to an unoccupied room adjoining my aunt's. Here, late one afternoon, I lay languidly singing to myself and watching the western sunbeams shimmering on the opposite wall. If you were ever ill as a child, you will remember such moments. You look by the hour at your thin, white hands; you listen to the sounds in the house, the opening of doors and the tread of feet; you murmur strange odds and ends of talk; and you watch the fading of the day and the dark flowering of the night. Presently my aunt came in, in-

troducing Coquelin, whom she left by my bedside. He sat with me a long time, talking in the old, kind way, and gradually lulled me to sleep with the gentle murmur of his voice. When I awoke again it was night. The sun was quenched on the opposite wall, but through a window on the same side came a broad ray of moonlight. In the window sat Coquelin, who had apparently not left the room. Near him was Mlle. de Bergerac.

Some time elapsed between my becoming conscious of their presence and my distinguishing the sense of the words that were passing between them. When I did so, if I had reached the age when one ponders and interprets what one hears, I should readily have perceived that since those last thrilling moments at Fossy their friendship had taken a very long step, and that the secret of each heart had changed place with its mate. But even now there was little that was careless and joyous in their young love; the first words of Mlle. Bergerac

that I distinguished betrayed the sombre tinge of their passion.

"I don't care what happens now," she said. "It will always be something to have lived through these days."

"You're stronger than I, then," said Coquelin. "I haven't the courage to defy the future. I'm afraid to think of it. Ah, why can't we make a future of our own?"

"It would be a greater happiness than we have a right to. Who are you, Pierre Coquelin, that you should claim the right to marry the girl you love, when she's a demoiselle de Bergerac to begin with? And who am I, that I should expect to have deserved a greater blessing than that one look of your eyes, which I shall never, never forget? It is more than enough to watch you and pray for you and worship you in silence."

"What am I? what are you? We are two honest mortals, who have a perfect right to repudiate the blessings of God. If ever a passion deserved its reward, mademoiselle, it's the

absolute love I bear you. It's not a spasm, a miracle, or a delusion; it's the most natural emotion of my nature."

"We don't live in a natural world, Coquelin. If we did, there would be no need of concealing this divine affection. Great heaven! who's natural? Is it my sister-in-law? Is it M. de Treuil? Is it my brother? My brother is sometimes so natural that he's brutal. Is it I myself? There are moments when I'm afraid of my nature."

It was too dark for me to distinguish my companions' faces in the course of this singular dialogue; but it's not hard to imagine how, as my aunt uttered these words, with a burst of sombre *naïveté,* her lover must have turned upon her face the puzzled brightness of his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"*Mon Dieu!* think how I have lived! What a senseless, thoughtless, passionless life! What solitude, ignorance, and languor! What trivial duties and petty joys! I have fancied my-

self happy at times, for it was God's mercy that I didn't know what I lacked. But now that my soul begins to stir and throb and live, it shakes me with its mighty pulsations. I feel as if in the mere wantonness of strength and joy it might drive me to some extravagance. I seem to feel myself making a great rush, with my eyes closed and my heart in my throat. And then the earth sinks away from under my feet, and in my ears is the sound of a dreadful tumult."

"Evidently we have very different ways of feeling. For you our love is action, passion; for me it's rest. For you it's romance; for me it's reality. For me it's a necessity; for you (how shall I say it?) it's a luxury. In point of fact, mademoiselle, how should it be otherwise? When a demoiselle de Bergerac bestows her heart upon an obscure adventurer, a man born in poverty and servitude, it's a matter of charity, of noble generosity."

Mlle. de Bergerac received this speech in silence, and for some moments nothing was said.

At last she resumed: "After all that has passed between us, Coquelin, it seems to me a matter neither of generosity nor of charity to allude again to that miserable fact of my birth."

"I was only trying to carry out your own idea, and to get at the truth with regard to our situation. If our love is worth a straw, we needn't be afraid of that. Isn't it true—blessedly true, perhaps, for all I know—that you shrink a little from taking me as I am? Except for my character, I'm so little! It's impossible to be less of a *personage*. You can't quite reconcile it to your dignity to love a nobody, so you fling over your weakness a veil of mystery and romance and exaltation. You regard your passion, perhaps, as more of an escapade, an adventure, than it needs to be."

"My 'nobody,'" said Mlle. de Bergerac, gently, "is a very wise man, and a great philosopher. I don't understand a word you say."

"Ah, so much the better!" said Coquelin with a little laugh.

"Will you promise me," pursued the young

girl, "never again by word or deed to allude to the difference of our birth? If you refuse, I shall consider you an excellent pedagogue, but no lover."

"Will you in return promise me—"

"Promise you what?"

Coquelin was standing before her, looking at her, with folded arms. "Promise me likewise to forget it!"

Mlle. de Bergerac stared a moment, and also rose to her feet. "Forget it! Is this generous?" she cried. "Is it delicate? I had pretty well forgot it, I think, on that dreadful day at Fossy!" Her voice trembled and swelled; she burst into tears. Coquelin attempted to remonstrate, but she motioned him aside, and swept out of the room.

It must have been a very genuine passion between these two, you'll observe, to allow this handling without gloves. Only a plant of hardy growth could have endured this chilling blast of discord and disputation. Ultimately, indeed, its effect seemed to have been to fortify

and consecrate their love. This was apparent several days later; but I know not what manner of communication they had had in the interval. I was much better, but I was still weak and languid. Mlle. de Bergerac brought me my breakfast in bed, and then, having helped me to rise and dress, led me out into the garden, where she had caused a chair to be placed in the shade. While I sat watching the bees and butterflies, and pulling the flowers to pieces, she strolled up and down the alley close at hand, taking slow stitches in a piece of embroidery. We had been so occupied about ten minutes, when Coquelin came towards us from his lodge,—by appointment, evidently, for this was a roundabout way to the house. Mlle. de Bergerac met him at the end of the path, where I could not hear what they said, but only see their gestures. As they came along together, she raised both hands to her ears, and shook her head with vehemence, as if to refuse to listen to what he was urging. When they drew

near my resting-place, she had interrupted him.

"No, no, no!" she cried, "I will never forget it to my dying day. How should I? How can I look at you without remembering it? It's in your face, your figure, your movements, the tones of your voice. It's you,—it's what I love in you! It was that which went through my heart that day at Fossy. It was the look, the tone, with which you called the place horrible; it was your bitter plebeian hate. When you spoke of the misery and baseness of your race, I could have cried out in an anguish of love! When I contradicted you, and pretended that I prized and honored all these tokens of your servitude,—just heaven! you know now what my words were worth!"

Coquelin walked beside her with his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes fixed on the ground with a look of repressed sensibility. He passed his poor little convalescent pupil without heeding him. When they came down

the path again, the young girl was still talking with the same feverish volubility.

"But most of all, the first day, the first hour, when you came up the avenue to my brother! I had never seen any one like you. I had seen others, but you had something that went to my soul. I devoured you with my eyes,—your dusty clothes, your uncombed hair, your pale face, the way you held yourself not to seem tired. I went down on my knees, then; I haven't been up since."

The poor girl, you see, was completely possessed by her passion, and yet she was in a very strait place. For her life she wouldn't recede; and yet how was she to advance? There must have been an odd sort of simplicity in her way of bestowing her love; or perhaps you'll think it an odd sort of subtlety. It seems plain to me now, as I tell the story, that Coquelin, with his perfect good sense, was right, and that there was, at this moment, a large element of romance in the composition of her feelings. She seemed to feel no desire

to realize her passion. Her hand was already bestowed; fate was inexorable. She wished simply to compress a world of bliss into her few remaining hours of freedom.

The day after this interview in the garden I came down to dinner; on the next I sat up to supper, and for some time afterwards, thanks to my aunt's preoccupation of mind. On rising from the table, my father left the château; my mother, who was ailing, returned to her room. Coquelin disappeared, under pretence of going to his own apartments; but, Mlle. de Bergerac having taken me into the drawing-room and detained me there some minutes, he shortly rejoined us.

"Great heaven, mademoiselle, this must end!" he cried, as he came into the room. "I can stand it no longer."

"Nor can I," said my aunt. "But I have given my word."

"Take back your word, then! Write him a letter—go to him—send me to him—anything! I can't stay here on the footing of a thief and

impostor. I'll do anything," he continued, as she was silent. "I'll go to him in person; I'll go to your brother; I'll go to your sister even. I'll proclaim it to the world. Or, if you don't like that, I'll keep it a mortal secret. I'll leave the château with you without an hour's delay. I'll defy pursuit and discovery. We'll go to America,—anywhere you wish, if it's only action. Only spare me the agony of seeing you drift along into that man's arms."

Mlle. de Bergerac made no reply for some moments. At last, "I will never marry M. de Treuil," she said.

To this declaration Coquelin made no response; but after a pause, "Well, well, well?" he cried.

"Ah, you're pitiless!" said the young girl.

"No, mademoiselle, from the bottom of my heart I pity you."

"Well, then, think of all you ask! Think of the inexpiable criminality of my love. Think of me standing here,—here before my mother's portrait,—murmuring out my shame, scorched

by my sister's scorn, buffeted by my brother's curses! Gracious heaven, Coquelin, suppose after all I were a bad, hard girl!"

"I'll suppose nothing; this is no time for hair-splitting." And then, after a pause, as if with a violent effort, in a voice hoarse and yet soft: "Gabrielle, passion is blind. Reason alone is worth a straw. I'll not counsel you in passion, let us wait till reason comes to us." He put out his hand; she gave him her own; he pressed it to his lips and departed.

On the following day, as I still professed myself too weak to resume my books, Coquelin left the château alone, after breakfast, for a long walk. He was going, I suppose, into the woods and meadows in quest of Reason. She was hard to find, apparently, for he failed to return to dinner. He reappeared, however, at supper, but now my father was absent. My mother, as she left the table, expressed the wish that Mlle. de Bergerac should attend her to her own room. Coquelin, meanwhile, went with me into the great saloon, and for half

an hour talked to me gravely and kindly about my studies, and questioned me on what we had learned before my illness. At the end of this time Mlle. de Bergerac returned.

"I got this letter to-day from M. de Treuil," she said, and offered him a missive which had apparently been handed to her since dinner.

"I don't care to read it," he said.

She tore it across and held the pieces to the flame of the candle. "He is to be here to-morrow," she added finally.

"Well?" asked Coquelin gravely.

"You know my answer."

"Your answer to him, perfectly. But what is your answer to me?"

She looked at him in silence. They stood for a minute, their eyes locked together. And then, in the same posture,—her arms loose at her sides, her head slightly thrown back,— "To you," she said, "my answer is—farewell."

The word was little more than whispered; but, though he heard it, he neither started nor spoke. He stood unmoved, all his soul trem-

bling under his brows and filling the space between his mistress and himself with a sort of sacred stillness. Then, gradually, his head sank on his breast, and his eyes dropped on the ground.

"It's reason," the young girl began. "Reason has come to me. She tells me that if I marry in my brother's despite, and in opposition to all the traditions that have been kept sacred in my family, I shall neither find happiness nor give it. I must choose the simplest course. The other is a gulf; I can't leap it. It's harder than you think. Something in the air forbids it,—something in the very look of these old walls, within which I was born and I've lived. I shall never marry; I shall go into religion. I tried to fling away my name; it was sowing dragons' teeth. I don't ask you to forgive me. It's small enough comfort that you should have the right to think of me as a poor, weak heart. Keep repeating that: it will console you. I shall not have the compen-

sation of doubting the perfection of what I love."

Coquelin turned away in silence. Mlle. de Bergerac sprang after him. "In Heaven's name," she cried, "say something! Rave, storm, swear, but don't let me think I've broken your heart."

"My heart's sound," said Coquelin, almost with a smile. "I regret nothing that has happened. O, how I love you!"

The young girl buried her face in her hands.

"This end," he went on, "is doubtless the only possible one. It's thinking very lightly of life to expect any other. After all, what call had I to interrupt your life,—to burden you with a trouble, a choice, a decision? As much as anything that I have ever known in you I admire your beautiful delicacy of conscience."

"Ah," said the young girl, with a moan, "don't kill me with fine names!"

And then came the farewell. "I feel," said poor Coquelin, "that I can't see you again.

We must not meet. I will leave Bergerac immediately,—to-night,—under pretext of having been summoned home by my mother's illness. In a few days I will write to your brother that circumstances forbid me to return."

My own part in this painful interview I shall not describe at length. When it began to dawn upon my mind that my friend was actually going to disappear, I was seized with a convulsion of rage and grief. "Ah," cried Mlle. de Bergerac bitterly, "that was all that was wanting!" What means were taken to restore me to composure, what promises were made me, what pious deception was practised, I forget; but, when at last I came to my senses, Coquelin had made his exit.

My aunt took me by the hand and prepared to lead me up to bed, fearing naturally that my ruffled aspect and swollen visage would arouse suspicion. At this moment I heard the clatter of hoofs in the court, mingled with the sound of voices. From the window, I saw

M. de Treuil and my father alighting from horseback. Mlle. de Bergerac, apparently, made the same observation; she dropped my hand and sank down in a chair. She was not left long in suspense. Perceiving a light in the saloon, the two gentlemen immediately made their way to this apartment. They came in together, arm in arm, the Vicomte dressed in mourning. Just within the threshold they stopped; my father disengaged his arm, took his companion by the hand and led him to Mlle. de Bergerac. She rose to her feet as you may imagine a sitting statue to rise. The Vicomte bent his knee.

"At last, mademoiselle," said he,—"sooner than I had hoped,—my long probation is finished."

The young girl spoke, but no one would have recognized her voice. "I fear, M. le Vicomte," she said, "that it has only begun."

The Vicomte broke into a harsh, nervous laugh.

"Fol de rol, mademoiselle," cried my father, "your pleasantry is in very bad taste."

But the Vicomte had recovered himself. "Mademoiselle is quite right," he declared; "she means that I must now begin to deserve my happiness." This little speech showed a very brave fancy. It was in flagrant discord with the expression of the poor girl's figure, as she stood twisting her hands together and rolling her eyes,—an image of sombre desperation.

My father felt there was a storm in the air. "M. le Vicomte is in mourning for M. de Sorbières," he said. "M. le Vicomte is his sole legatee. He comes to exact the fulfilment of your promise."

"I made no promise," said Mlle. de Bergerac.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle; you gave your word that you'd wait for me."

"Gracious heaven!" cried the young girl; "haven't I waited for you!"

"Ma toute belle," said the Baron, trying to

keep his angry voice within the compass of an undertone, and reducing it in the effort to a very ugly whisper, "if I had supposed you were going to make us a scene, *nom de Dieu!* I would have taken my precautions beforehand! You know what you're to expect. Vicomte, keep her to her word. I'll give you half an hour. Come, Chevalier." And he took me by the hand. —

We had crossed the threshold and reached the hall, when I heard the Vicomte give a long moan, half plaintive, half indignant. My father turned, and answered with a fierce, inarticulate cry, which I can best describe as a roar. He straightway retraced his steps, I, of course, following. Exactly what, in the brief interval, had passed between our companions I am unable to say; but it was plain that Mlle. de Bergerac, by some cruelly unerring word or act, had discharged the bolt of her refusal. Her gallant lover had sunk into a chair, burying his face in his hands, and stamping his feet on the floor in a frenzy of disappointment.

She stood regarding him in a sort of helpless, distant pity. My father had been going to break out into a storm of imprecations; but he suppressed them, and folded his arms.

"And now, mademoiselle," he said, "will you be so good as to inform me of your intentions?"

Beneath my father's gaze the softness passed out of my aunt's face and gave place to an angry defiance, which he must have recognized as cousin-german, at least, to the passion in his own breast. "My intentions had been," she said, "to let M. le Vicomte know that I couldn't marry him, with as little offence as possible. But you seem determined, my brother, to thrust in a world of offence somewhere."

You must not blame Mlle. de Bergerac for the sting of her retort. She foresaw a hard fight; she had only sprung to her arms.

My father looked at the wretched Vicomte, as he sat sobbing and stamping like a child. His bosom was wrung with pity for his friend. "Look at that dear Gaston, that charming man, and blush for your audacity."

"I know a great deal more about my audacity than you, brother. I might tell you things that would surprise you."

"Gabrielle, you are mad!" the Baron broke out.

"Perhaps I am," said the young girl. And then, turning to M. de Treuil, in a tone of exquisite reproach, "M. le Vicomte, you suffer less well than I had hoped."

My father could endure no more. He seized his sister by her two wrists, so that beneath the pressure her eyes filled with tears. "Heartless fool!" he cried, "do you know what I can do to you?"

"I can imagine, from this specimen," said the poor creature.

The Baron was beside himself with passion. "Down, down on your knees," he went on, "and beg our pardon all round for your senseless, shameless perversity!" As he spoke, he increased the pressure of his grasp to that degree that, after a vain struggle to free herself, she uttered a scream of pain. The Vicomte sprang

to his feet. "In heaven's name, Gabrielle," he cried,—and it was the only real *naïveté* that he had ever uttered,—"isn't it all a horrible jest?"

Mlle. de Bergerac shook her head. "It seems hard, Vicomte," she said, "that I should be answerable for your happiness."

"You hold it there in your hand. Think of what I suffer. To have lived for weeks in the hope of this hour, and to find it what you would fain make it! To have dreamed of rapturous bliss, and to wake to find it hideous misery! Think of it once again!"

"She shall have a chance to think of it," the Baron declared; "she shall think of it quite at her ease. Go to your room, mademoiselle, and remain there till further notice."

Gabrielle prepared to go, but, as she moved away, "I used to fear you, brother," she said with homely scorn, "but I don't fear you now. Judge whether it's because I love you more!"

"Gabrielle," the Vicomte cried out, "I haven't given you up."

"Your feelings are your own, M. le Vicomte. I would have given more than I can say rather than have caused you to suffer. Your asking my hand has been the great honor of my life; my withholding it has been the great trial." And she walked out of the room with the step of unacted tragedy. My father, with an oath, despatched me to bed in her train. Heavy-headed with the recent spectacle of so much half-apprehended emotion, I speedily fell asleep.

I was aroused by the sound of voices, and the grasp of a heavy hand on my shoulder. My father stood before me, holding a candle, with M. de Treuil beside him. "Chevalier," he said, "open your eyes like a man, and come to your senses."

Thus exhorted, I sat up and stared. The Baron sat down on the edge of the bed. "This evening," he began, "before the Vicomte and I came in, were you alone with your aunt?" —My dear friend, you see the scene from here. I answered with the cruel directness of my

years. Even if I had had the wit to dissemble, I should have lacked the courage. Of course I had no story to tell. I had drawn no inferences; I didn't say that my tutor was my aunt's lover. I simply said that he had been with us after supper, and that he wanted my aunt to go away with him. Such was my part in the play. I see the whole picture again,—my father brandishing the candlestick, and devouring my words with his great flaming eyes; and the Vicomte behind, portentously silent, with his black clothes and his pale face.

They had not been three minutes out of the room when the door leading to my aunt's chamber opened and Mlle. de Bergerac appeared. She had heard sounds in my apartment, and suspected the visit of the gentlemen and its motive. She immediately won from me the recital of what I had been forced to avow. "Poor Chevalier," she cried, for all commentary. And then, after a pause, "What made them suspect that M. Coquelin had been with us?"

"They saw him, or some one, leave the château as they came in."

"And where have they gone now?"

"To supper. My father said to M. de Treuil that first of all they must sup."

Mlle. de Bergerac stood a moment in meditation. Then suddenly, "Get up, Chevalier," she said, "I want you to go with me."

"Where are you going?"

"To M. Coquelin's."

I needed no second admonition. I hustled on my clothes; Mlle. de Bergerac left the room and immediately returned, clad in a light mantle. We made our way undiscovered to one of the private entrances of the château, hurried across the park and found a light in the window of Coquelin's lodge. It was about half past nine. Mlle. de Bergerac gave a loud knock at the door, and we entered her lover's apartment.

Coquelin was seated at his table writing. He sprang to his feet with a cry of amazement. Mlle. de Bergerac stood panting, with one

hand pressed to her heart, while rapidly moving the other as if to enjoin calmness.

"They are come back," she began,—"M. de Treuil and my brother!"

"I thought he was to come to-morrow. Was it a deception?"

"Ah, no! not from him,—an accident. Pierre Coquelin, I've had such a scene! But it's not your fault."

"What made the scene?"

"My refusal, of course."

"You turned off the Vicomte?"

"Holy Virgin! You ask me?"

"Unhappy girl!" cried Coquelin.

"No, I was a happy girl to have had a chance to act as my heart bade me. I had faltered enough. But it was hard!"

"It's all hard."

"The hardest is to come," said my aunt. She put out her hand; he sprang to her and seized it, and she pressed his own with vehemence. "They have discovered our secret,—

don't ask how. It was Heaven's will. From this moment, of course—"

"From this moment, of course," cried Coquelin, "I stay where I am!"

With an impetuous movement she raised his hand to her lips and kissed it. "You stay where you are. We have nothing to conceal, but we have nothing to avow. We have no confessions to make. Before God we have done our duty. You may expect them, I fancy, to-night; perhaps, too, they will honor me with a visit. They are supping between two battles. They will attack us with fury, I know; but let them dash themselves against our silence as against a wall of stone. I have taken my stand. My love, my errors, my longings, are my own affair. My reputation is a sealed book. Woe to him who would force it open!"

The poor girl had said once, you know, that she was afraid of her nature. Assuredly it had now sprung erect in its strength; it came hurrying into action on the winds of her indigna-

tion. "Remember, Coquelin," she went on, "you are still and always my friend. You are the guardian of my weakness, the support of my strength."

"Say it all, Gabrielle!" he cried. "I'm for ever and ever your lover!"

Suddenly, above the music of his voice, there came a great rattling knock at the door. Coquelin sprang forward; it opened in his face and disclosed my father and M. de Treuil. I have no words in my dictionary, no images in my rhetoric, to represent the sudden horror that leaped into my father's face as his eye fell upon his sister. He staggered back a step and then stood glaring, until his feelings found utterance in a single word: *"Coureuse!"* I have never been able to look upon the word as trivial since that moment.

The Vicomte came striding past him into the room, like a bolt of lightning from a rumbling cloud, quivering with baffled desire, and looking taller by the head for his passion. "And it was for this, mademoiselle," he cried, "and

for *that!*" and he flung out a scornful hand toward Coquelin. "For a beggarly, boorish, ignorant pedagogue!"

Coquelin folded his arms. "Address me directly, M. le Vicomte," he said; "don't fling mud at me over mademoiselle's head."

"You? Who are you?" hissed the nobleman. "A man doesn't address you; he sends his lackeys to flog you!"

"Well, M. le Vicomte, you're complete," said Coquelin, eyeing him from head to foot.

"Complete?" and M. de Treuil broke into an almost hysterical laugh. "I only lack having married your mistress!"

"Ah!" cried Mlle. de Bergerac.

"O, you poor, insensate fool!" said Coquelin.

"Heaven help me," the young man went on, "I'm ready to marry her still."

While these words were rapidly exchanged, my father stood choking with the confusion of amusement and rage. He was stupefied at his sister's audacity,—at the dauntless spirit which ventured to flaunt its shameful passion in the

very face of honor and authority. Yet that simple interjection which I have quoted from my aunt's lips stirred a secret tremor in his heart; it was like the striking of some magic silver bell, portending monstrous things. His passion faltered, and, as his eyes glanced upon my innocent head (which, it must be confessed, was sadly out of place in that pernicious scene), alighted on this smaller wrong. "The next time you go on your adventures, mademoiselle," he cried, "I'd thank you not to pollute my son by dragging him at your skirts."

"I'm not sorry to have my family present," said the young girl, who had had time to collect her thoughts. "I should be glad even if my sister were here. I wish simply to bid you farewell."

Coquelin, at these words, made a step towards her. She passed her hand through his arm. "Things have taken place—and chiefly within the last moment—which change the face of the future. You've done the business, brother," and she fixed her glittering eyes on

the Baron; "you've driven me back on myself. I spared you, but you never spared me. I cared for my name; you loaded it with dishonor. I chose between happiness and duty,—duty as you would have laid it down: I preferred duty. But now that happiness has become one with simple safety from violence and insult, I go back to happiness. I give you back your name; though I have kept it more jealously than you. I have another ready for me. O Messieurs!" she cried, with a burst of rapturous exaltation, "for what you have done to me I thank you."

My father began to groan and tremble. He had grasped my hand in his own, which was clammy with perspiration. "For the love of God, Gabrielle," he implored, "or the fear of the Devil, speak so that a sickened, maddened Christian can understand you! For what purpose did you come here to-night?"

"*Mon Dieu,* it's a long story. You made short work with it. I might in justice do as

much. I came here, brother, to guard my reputation, and not to lose it."

All this while my father had neither looked at Coquelin nor spoken to him, either because he thought him not worth his words, or because he had kept some transcendent insult in reserve. Here my governor broke in. "It seems to me time, M. le Baron, that I should inquire the purpose of your own visit."

My father stared a moment. "I came, M. Coquelin, to take you by the shoulders and eject you through that door, with the further impulsion, if necessary, of a vigorous kick."

"Good! And M. le Vicomte?"

"M. le Vicomte came to see it done."

"Perfect! A little more and you had come too late. I was on the point of leaving Bergerac. I can put the story into three words. I have been so happy as to secure the affections of Mlle. de Bergerac. She asked herself, devoutly, what course of action was possible under the circumstances. She decided that the only course was that we should immediately

separate. I had no hesitation in bringing my residence with M. le Chevalier to a sudden close. I was to have quitted the château early to-morrow morning, leaving mademoiselle at absolute liberty. With her refusal of M. de Treuil I have nothing to do. Her action in this matter seems to have been strangely precipitated, and my own departure anticipated in consequence. It was at her adjuration that I was preparing to depart. She came here this evening to command me to stay. In our relations there was nothing that the world had a right to lay a finger upon. From the moment that they were suspected it was of the first importance to the security and sanctity of Mlle. de Bergerac's position that there should be no appearance on my part of elusion or flight. The relations I speak of had ceased to exist; there was, therefore, every reason why for the present I should retain my place. Mlle. de Bergerac had been here some three minutes, and had just made known her wishes, when you arrived with the honorable inten-

tions which you avow, and under that illusion the perfect stupidity of which is its least reproach. In my own turn, Messieurs, I thank you!"

"Gabrielle," said my father, as Coquelin ceased speaking, "the long and short of it appears to be that after all you needn't marry this man. Am I to understand that you intend to?"

"Brother, I mean to marry M. Coquelin."

My father stood looking from the young girl to her lover. The Vicomte walked to the window, as if he were in want of air. The night was cool and the window closed. He tried the sash, but for some reason it resisted. Whereupon he raised his sword-hilt and with a violent blow shivered a pane into fragments. The Baron went on: "On what do you propose to live?"

"It's for me to propose," said Coquelin. "My wife shall not suffer."

"Whither do you mean to go?"

"Since you're so good as to ask,—to Paris."

My father had got back his fire. "Well, then," he cried, "my bitterest unforgiveness go with you, and turn your unholy pride to abject woe! My sister may marry a base-born vagrant if she wants, but I shall not give her away. I hope you'll enjoy the mud in which you've planted yourself. I hope your marriage will be blessed in the good old fashion, and that you'll regard philosophically the sight of a half-dozen starving children. I hope you'll enjoy the company of chandlers and cobblers and scribblers!" The Baron could go no further. "Ah, my sister!" he half exclaimed. His voice broke; he gave a great convulsive sob, and fell into a chair.

"Coquelin," said my aunt, "take me back to the château."

As she walked to the door, her hand in the young man's arm, the Vicomte turned short about from the window, and stood with his drawn sword, grimacing horribly.

"Not if I can help it!" he cried through his teeth, and with a sweep of his weapon he made

a savage thrust at the young girl's breast. Coquelin, with equal speed, sprang before her, threw out his arm, and took the blow just below the elbow.

"Thank you, M. le Vicomte," he said, "for the chance of calling you a coward! There was something I wanted."

Mlle. de Bergerac spent the night at the château, but by early dawn she had disappeared. Whither Coquelin betook himself with his gratitude and his wound, I know not. He lay, I suppose, at some neighboring farmer's. My father and the Vicomte kept for an hour a silent, sullen vigil in my preceptor's vacant apartment,—for an hour and perhaps longer, for at the end of this time I fell asleep, and when I came to my senses, the next morning, I was in my own bed.

M. de Bergerac had finished his tale.

"But the marriage," I asked, after a pause, —"was it happy?"

"Reasonably so, I fancy. There is no doubt

that Coquelin was an excellent fellow. They had three children, and lost them all. They managed to live. He painted portraits and did literary work.

"And his wife?"

"Her history, I take it, is that of all good wives: she loved her husband. When the Revolution came, they went into politics; but here, in spite of his base birth, Coquelin acted with that superior temperance which I always associate with his memory. He was no *sans-culotte*. They both went to the scaffold among the Girondists."